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**The Biblical Use of the Descent Tradition and Its Conceptualization
toward the *Descensus Christi ad Inferos***

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Bumsik Kim**

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BUMSIK KIM

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Faculty Committee

Gregory J. Riley, Chairperson

Marvin A. Sweeney

Karen J. Torjesen

Dean of the Faculty

John R. Fitzmier

May 2006



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ABSTRACT

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Descensus Christi ad Inferos

Bumsik Kim

Descent myths or stories appear in many cultures and religious themes. Amidst them, the descent into the netherworld takes place when divinities, heroes, or humans descend to the underworld to save their loved ones, or to represent the theme of the cycle of seasons, or to show the audience the features of the afterlife. Such mythical traditions have been appropriated and sometimes demythologized into biblical conceptualizations that are demonstrated in several biblical texts. I examine these descent stories and traditions and their uses in the Bible, which have converged into a later idea of Christ's descent into Hades.

The diverse biblical conceptualizations of this *descensus* tradition occur in Jonah's Jewish descent into Sheol, Luke's Greek *nekyia*, Paul's Christological articulation of Christ's *descensus* and *ascensus*, John's gnostic idea of Christ's descent in the sayings of the Son of Man, and 1 Peter's baptismal conceptualization of Christ's descent for his proclamation to the spirits. These biblical conceptualizations demonstrate their cosmologies as well as the features of the afterlife, developed at the turn of the Christian era. The conceptual trajectory of the idea of the *Descensus Christi ad Inferos* reflects its mythical overtones, to the extent that such a Christological articulation

involves the mythological reflection of Christ's three-day death. This configuration of Christ's death came to mean the *Descensuskampf* or *Chaoskampf* for the early church fathers. The theological and exegetical works of the church fathers in the ante-Nicene period indicate the early existence of the teaching of Christ's descent into Hades even prior to its insertion into the creeds in the fourth century.

In the history of an idea, Christ's descent into Hades is distinctive in that Christ's death itself was conceptualized as to mean his victory over Hades and Death. Thus the early Christians find an eschatological sign of Christian victory over death and evil in Christ's descent and proclamation during the *triduum mortis*.

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CHAPTER 1

The Christological Myth: The *Descensus Christi ad Inferos*

The Christ of Mythological Imagination

The mythical idea of the *Descensus Christi ad Inferos* (Christ's descent into hell) came to be accepted into one of the Christological formulations in the creeds around the latter half of the fourth century C.E. Though the teaching of Christ's descent into hell had been branded to be heretical and peripheral in the history of church because of the lack of the biblical proof and its doctrinal problem, I would argue for the validity and Christological significance of its teaching, in that the idea has a long history of the biblical conceptualization of the diverse descent myths and thereby the early church fathers understood Jesus' death during the *triduum mortis* (three days' death) in such a way, whether or not it provokes the doctrinal issues concerning the idea. I recognize that the *Descensus Christi* came to be articulated as a *Chaoskampf* (battle against chaos) *Descensuskampf* (descent combat), and placed as one of the Christological teachings on Christ's death in the early church in the end of the first century, while a Christological idea of the descent conforms to those who have culture-bound mythical imaginations and worldviews concerning the diverse descent myths.

In the Bible, mythological language indicates that the Bible includes some ancient myths, despite the fact that those myths tend to be demythologized or recede into the background. The ancient myths had arisen so that the culture of one people could express their speculation on the origins of the cosmos and gods or the specific worldview through

which they saw themselves and things around them. Similarly, the New Testament presents a mythical world picture that is not possible to be comprehended in the modern scientific world.

Recognizing this hermeneutical problem, Rudolf Bultmann suggests a hermeneutical process of demythologizing New Testament proclamations in order to rediscover valid truths that still speak to modern believers from the past mythical world picture.¹ For him, to eliminate myth from the New Testament is not possible for valid hermeneutics. Instead, his notion of *entmythologisierung* (demythologizing) is an attempt to interpret the mythical representations in existentialist terms, while rejecting objectifying mythical representations.² When the New Testament seeks to describe religious faith, it adopts the imaginative representations of its nature as embodiments of the truth rather than philosophic perception. D. F. Strauss calls such religious imaginative representation “myth.”³ According to him, a biblical or evangelical myth is simply a narrative relating directly or indirectly to Jesus, which may be considered not as the expression of a fact, but as the product of an idea of his earliest followers. That is,

¹ Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology: The Problem of Demythologizing the New Testament Proclamation,” in *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, selected, edited, and translated by Schubert M. Ogden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 1-43. First printed as “Neues Testament und Mythologie: Das Problem der Entmythologisierung der neutestamentlichen Verkündigung,” in *Kerygma und Mythos I*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch (Herbert Reich: Hamburg-Volksdorf, 1948), 15-53.

² Bultmann declares that “demythologizing is an hermeneutic method, that is, a method of interpretation, of exegesis,” in *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Son, 1958), 45, cited in John Macquarrie, *The Scope of Demythologizing: Bultmann and His Critics* (London: SCM Press, 1960), 34.

³ James P. Mackey, *Jesus, the Man and the Myth: A Contemporary Christology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 30, citing David F. Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, trans. from 4th German ed. by George Elliot (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 80, maintains that the mythical element must necessarily exist in the proper religious sphere in the Bible.

such myth was expressed and embellished to convey a religious conception of some of the community.⁴ This centrality of myth in the founding expression of the Christian faith can be considered Strauss' great contribution to the modern quest of the historical Jesus.

The "conceptualization of the myth," which I would call "mythological appropriation,"⁵ was done for the early Christians who were exposed to diverse influences from the Greco-Roman world and even the overarching Jewish heritage that belonged to the Near Eastern world. Among the diverse Christological explanations of Jesus' nature in the post-resurrection period, the conceptualization of the descent myths might extend and elevate Christ's role in the level of cosmology and mythology. This Christological configuration has been made through inheriting the conceptual developments of the afterlife picture in the Greco-Roman world and the cosmological and mythical speculations of the origin of sin,⁶ which are related with Persian cosmic dualism, Jewish apocalyptic worldview, and Greek cosmology and anthropology.⁷

Scholars have raised the issue of the relationship between broad descent mythologies and biblical descent concept. When Robinson looks to the diverse myths of a descent into Hades in the history of religion in relation to the idea of Christ's descent, he concludes,

⁴ Mackey argues that while "the allegorical interpreter considers the idea hidden in the outward clothing of the story to be of divine provenance, the mythic interpreter considers the idea so clothed to be the product of some human community," in *Jesus, the Man and the Myth*, 31.

⁵ The distinction between myth and mythology should be made in that the latter is the mythical revision of the former. In this regard, the conceptualization of mythical material can be termed "mythology" which serves for the early Christian attempts to formulate Christology.

⁶ Before the Christian era, the origin of sins came to be explained as originating from the corruptions of angels and humans, or materiality of the world and body, or the cosmic existence of Devil.

⁷ In the following chapters, Greek Hades scene, the doctrine of soul, the old Jewish Watcher myth, or the existence of Devil stand as backgrounds to the biblical conceptualization of the descent.

This broad tradition of mythology provides less the origin and meaning of the NT idea of Christ's descent into Hades than the vehicle of its development and the cause of its degeneration.⁸

This observation is certainly true because the connections between descent mythologies and early Christian Christology related with Christ's descent are not direct in seeking the latter's origin. Obviously, however, he recognizes a certain trajectory of formulating its idea, by noting the "vehicle" from and "cause" against the descent myths in the development of Christ's descent in early Christian Christology.

B. L. Mack also acknowledges that there may well be no straight-line development or identification between Jesus and the descent myth of Wisdom in his search for the connection between Christology and Jewish wisdom mythologies (descent-ascent). But he still holds that "the creative rearrangements for traditional images, symbols, categories, models, and narrative patterns served to explain and interpret current events."⁹ Conzelmann calls a theological rearrangement of mythical material a *reflektierender Mythologie* (reflective mythology) that was theologized at a certain time.¹⁰ Fiorenza rephrases this as a "form of theology appropriating mythical language, material, and patterns...for its own theological concerns," which is not to reproduce the myth itself.¹¹ In this respect, the idea of Christ's descent is not a myth itself, but a

⁸ James M. Robinson, "Descent into Hades," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick et al., vol. 1 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 826.

⁹ Burton L. Mack, "The Christ and Jewish Wisdom," in *The Messiah: Development in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, ed. James H. Charlesworth et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 195.

¹⁰ Hans Conzelmann, "Die Mutter der Weisheit" in *Zeit und Geschichte: Dankesgabe an Rudolf Bultmann zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. Erich Dinkler (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1964), 227. This points to the theological reflection of the myth.

¹¹ Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, "Wisdom Mythology and the Christological Hymns of the New Testament," in *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Robert L. Wilken

product of Christological rearrangements of mythical themes and cultural symbols by the early church.

When early Christianity mythologized Jesus, his death also came to be mythologized in terms of rearranging the traditional images, mythic metaphors, categories, and models so that it could appeal to early Christians who interpreted the Christ-event as the Christ of mythic imagination in the milieu of the Greco-Roman world. Those mythical elements that were appropriated and adopted into Christian mythological imagination could be called a “*descensus* tradition.”¹²

Mythical Confluence in Jesus’ Death

Descent (κατάβαιος) myths or stories appear in many cultures and religious themes.¹³ Among them, the descent into the netherworld takes place when divinities, heroes, humans descend to the underworld to save their loved ones from the realm of the dead (Heracles, Orpheus, Dionysus, Gilgamesh, and Anat). Another descent to the underworld appears in the theme of the cycle of the seasons in terms of the disappearance and renewal of fertility in such stories as Inanna and Dumuzi, Ishtar and Tammuz, Baal and Anat, Demeter and Persephone, and Aphrodite and Adonis.

(Notre Dame: University Press, 1975), 29.

¹² In the following, I would mostly use this term rather than a descent myth in that it refers to a broader scope of the diverse descent traditions in the Hellenistic culture including the ancient myths.

¹³ See Richard Bauckham, “Descent to the Underworld,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman et al., vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 145-59.

Another type of descent is related with the tour of hell, by which some people go though κατάβασις in visions, trances, dreams, or near-death experiences as seen in the journeys of Enoch (*1 Enoch*), the story of Er (Plato's *Republic* 10), and the dream of Scipio (Cicero's *Republic* 6). The Homeric *nekyia* in *Odyssey* 11 might be the most famous description of the underworld. Aeneas' *nekyia* in *Aeneid* 6 demonstrates more elaborate descriptions of Hades with the Platonic underworld and doctrine of the soul. Those who experienced the descent came back to life to tell the audience the revelations of the secrets of the afterlife and the pictures of Hades. These stories of the descent to the underworld, that is, *nekyia*, function as an explanation of human mortality, the order of nature, and the necessity of an ethical life as preparation for afterlife judgment.

W. Bousset observes that Christian belief in the descent of Christ into the underworld represents the assimilation and spiritualization of such a primitive myth.¹⁴ The purpose of the heroic descent is to wage a war against the powers of the underworld. In this regard, the old combat myths between the divine protagonist and evil enemy might underlie Christ's harrowing of hell. It is certain that the Zoroastrian cosmic battle between the good and evil forces has had an important impact on formulating its idea. Like Bousset, Beare also sees the doctrine of the descent of Christ into Hades as clearly reflecting the ancient pagan myths:

The doctrine of the descent of Christ into Hades, though it has captivated the imagination of many generations and has even found a place in the Creed, belongs to the periphery of Christian teaching, not to the centre – if indeed it can be said to have any legitimate place in Christian teaching at all. It is nothing else than the *appropriation*, and the *application* to Christ, of a fragment of the redemption-mythology of the Oriental religions, best known to us in the ancient story of the

¹⁴ Wilhelm Bousset, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1907), 244.

descent of Ishtar to the underworld, and reflected also in a number of Greek myths.¹⁵

Beare points to the appropriation and application of the myths to Christological activity. It appears that the *Descensus Christi ad Inferos* suggests something more than simply application and appropriation of the myths. The biblical conceptualization of the myth demands more than simple demythologization. It seeks more Christological achievement to which the myths had pointed. For example, early Christianity takes a different direction of conceptualization while appropriating the descent myths. While the heroic figures like Heracles, Orpheus, and Asclepius descend alive to Hades, Jesus' descent to Hades occurs during his death, making a significant difference from other myths because death is considered as the power of Satan.

Such mythical descent traditions as Gilgamesh, Baal, Inanna, and the Greek *nekyia* show a certain effort to attain divine immortality and to approach the rigid boundary between the living and the dead. In Christ's descent, the unbreakable boundary between the living and the dead came to be broken, while Christian speculation on the effect of Christ's three-day death adopts the old descent myths of divine or heroic descent to the underworld so that the Christ-event could be expanded to the souls in the underworld as his ultimate victory over the powers of death, Satan, and Hades, as seen in Heb. 2:14-18 and Rev. 1:18 ("I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades). When such Christian conceptualization or

¹⁵ Francis W. Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter: The Greek Text, with Introduction and Notes* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1947), 145. Such scholars as Hauck, Knopf, Gunkel, Windisch, Bousset, and Bultmann maintain that the material in the Petrine passage finds its roots in pagan myths of the descent. See John S. Feinberg, "1 Peter 3:18-20, Ancient Mythology, and the Intermediate State," *WTS* 48 (1986): 312. Cf. Italics are mine to indicate Beare's notion of mythological application and appropriation in Christ's descent.

mythologization meditates on the role of Christ at the level of cosmology and myth, depending on the conceptual developments of the underworld and the afterlife in the Greco-Roman world and the newly-developed geocentric cosmology, a Christological conceptualization or articulation of the effect of Christ's death leads into a formulation of *Descensuskampf* or *Chaoskampf* which has a meaningful struggle for a better life or human immortality under the influence of the cosmic dualism of Zoroastrianism.

While the Gilgamesh tradition has been observed as a human failure in gaining immortality, the Baal cycle demonstrates a possibility of conquering Death (Mot).¹⁶ The unbreakable boundary between the living and the dead has been broken by the heroic or divine infiltration into the netherworld to reach and save the loved ones from the land of "no return." Whether the *descensus* tradition stemmed from pagan myths, the fleshly death of Christ seemed to have gone through the process of conceptualization for his expansive soteriological work. The early docetic view of Jesus, however, denied the fleshly death of Jesus and logically rejected Jesus' descent to the spatial Hades. The idea of Christ's descent into Hades rejects such a docetic Jesus.

The Christological expression of faith in Christ's redemptive work by way of assimilating and spiritualizing the *descensus* tradition seemed to have given rise to the doctrine of universal salvation in Alexandrian interpretation. Even before the fathers of Alexandria welcomed the Petrine passage for its universalistic understanding of

¹⁶ The so-called Isaianic Apocalypse (Isa. 24-27) describes the vision of the prophetic "day of YHWH" by seeing God as the savior and Lord of life and death. In Isa. 25:8-9, Isaiah prophesies, "He [YHWH] will swallow up death (בלע המות) for ever" (25:8), with a Canaanite motif of Baal's victory over Mot. See Alan F. Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 258. This mythological image of the victory over Mot is also used by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:55, "O Death, where is thy victory? O Death, where is thy sting?"

salvation, the primitive Christological myth of Christ's descent arose independently of 1 Peter 3:19. The doctrine of the so-called harrowing of Hades has grown out of the belief that God will deliver souls from punishment in purgatory or Hades, when early Christianity developed the possibility of the remission of pain in the afterlife punishment and also that of the transference of the sinful souls to the state of bliss through purgatorial punishments.¹⁷ The biblical references as a proof text for such a doctrine usually come from the two enigmatic Petrine passages in 1 Peter 3:18-20 ("he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison") and 4:6 ("the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead").

Jesus' descending to Hades and preaching to the spirits in prison caused theological and Christological problems among the early church fathers and even the creedal formations in church history.¹⁸ Notwithstanding the fact that Christ's descent was not associated with the text of 1 Peter 3 in the earliest days of Christianity, it was a well-attested belief in the second century C.E.¹⁹ Although Clement of Alexandria is the one who quotes 1 Peter 3:18-20 for the doctrine of harrowing of Hades in the second century, the *Shepherd of Hermas* in the end of the first century C.E. mentions the

¹⁷ For the history of the doctrinal development, see John A. MacCulloch, *The Harrowing of Hell: A Comparative Study of an Early Christian Doctrine* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930).

¹⁸ The phrase, "Christ descended into Hell," did not appear in the early version of the Apostle's Creed until 650 C.E., except for Rufinus' *Commentary on the Apostle's Creed*, written in 390 C.E. in which he suggested that the phrase, *descendit ad inferna*, was already inserted in the creed at his church of Aquileia. It should be clarified here that the doctrine of the *descensus* first appeared in a creedal form occurred in the allied creeds of the Synods of Sirmium as "the Fourth Formula," in 359 C.E. See Wayne Grudem, "He Did Not Descend into Hell: A Plea for Following Scripture Instead of the Apostle's Creed," *JETS* 34/1 (1991): 103-13.

¹⁹ Kilian McDonnell, "The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan and the Descent into Hell," *Worship* 69/2 (1995): 100-01. He mentions that Joseph Chaine, Friedrich Loofs, and J.N.D. Kelly argue that this belief is revealed in the works of Ignatius (*To the Magnesians* 9.2; *To the Trallians* 9.1), Polycarp (*To the Philippians* 1.2), Justin (*Dialogue with Trypho* 72), Irenaeus (*Against Heresies*, 3.20.4; 4.22.1; 4.27.1; 5.31.1), and Tertullian (*De anima* 55) in the second century and the early third century. Since the time of Clement and Origen, Hades and 1 Peter 3 have been connected.

evangelization of the dead by the apostles who follow the ministry of Christ for the dead (9.16.6). It is sometimes argued that the earliest biblical reference to the *Descensus Christi* is seen in Paul's rhetorical question in Romans 10:6-7.²⁰ The Christological understanding of the descent seems to have arisen independently of the Petrine passage because many other biblical passages have been borrowed for the teaching of Christ's descent (Job 38:17;²¹ Ps. 24; Mt 16:18; Acts 2:25-31; Heb. 11:39-40; Rev. 1:18, 9:1, 20:1; Eph. 4:6-9; Col. 2:9-15). This demonstrates that the tradition of Christ's descent had a long history already in the first century of the church.

It should be noted that the *descensus* tradition is not simply appropriated and applied to Christ's death. Rather, some authors of the New Testament consider it from a perspective of Christ's incarnation into history. Christ's descent to earth came to mean something soteriological as to free his people from slavery and to awake the souls from oblivion in order to make them rich (John 3; Rom. 10:6-7; Eph. 4:6-10; 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:6-11). Origen already notes the spiritual meaning of Jesus' "two sandals"²² (one descent into history and the other descent to Hades), while he considers two Hadeses (higher and lower Hades, *De princ.* 4.3.10). The Gospel of John, even, demonstrates that Christ's descent to this world is described as being sent to "darkness," which metaphor is dominantly used in the gnostic texts to refer to "this world." As in the gnostic myth of Sophia's descent to the world to awaken the sleeping souls ("the Hymn of Pronoia" in the

²⁰ Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (London: SCM Press, 1980), 288, maintains that Paul for the first time in the New Testament joins Christ's ascension to his descent into the "abyss" (ἄβυσσος).

²¹ This is the only scriptural reference in the fourth formula of Sirmium creed.

²² See the section 6.174 in *Commentary on the Gospel According to John: Books 1-10*, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989).

Apocalyphon of John; the *Trimorphic Protennoia*), Jesus descended to the world to teach the souls in darkness their origin, destiny and “things above.” When the Bible uses the motif of the descent, it demythologizes and conceptualizes it so that Christ could be understood as a new enthroned deity who achieves *apotheosis* through his heroic death,²³ as well as the redeemer who enlightens the sleeping souls in the world and also saves the dead from the netherworld.

It is likely that the *descensus* tradition has influenced the formulation of the idea of Christ’s descent into Hades. Although the Bible as a whole tends to demythologize any mythical story related to divinities and heroes in the Greco-Roman world as well as in the ancient Near East, the mythological speculation of Christ’s descent seems to have easily utilized and Christianized the old myths of the *descensus* for the effect of His death.

Angle of Approach and Content Overview

The following discussion in the dissertation is concerned with the diverse biblical conceptualizations of the *descensus* tradition in the biblical texts, though I limit myself to the selected texts from the Bible. I try to select those texts from Jewish and Greek, apocalyptic and liturgical sources, as well as Gospels and letters, so as to show how variously the *descensus* tradition is contextualized and Christianized by each author.

The reason I start with the book of Jonah in this dissertation is that Jonah, one of

²³ For this view of Jesus as a Greek divinized hero, see Gregory J. Riley, *One Jesus, Many Christs: How Jesus Inspired Not One True Christianity, But Many* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 15-95.

the Twelve Prophets, adds one more sphere, i.e., Sheol, to the traditional Hebrew bipolar or bipartite cosmological view of creation (“heaven and earth”) for a theological consideration.²⁴ Furthermore Jonah’s attempt to escape from God the Creator of heaven and earth, by means of his sea journey to the uncertain place of Tarshish (תַּרְשִׁישׁ), reflects his descent to the netherworld, highlighted by his being swallowed by a chaotic sea creature. The notable motif of the ultimate descent into the belly of the big fish through his continuing descent (יֵרֵד), as falling away from the face of God, is conceptualized as “Jewish wisdom speculation” for a theological message to the Jewish community in crisis. This conceptualization is based on the death experience and salvation through human direction toward the cosmic center of the Temple and God’s intervention.

The old Mesopotamian descent myth of Gilgamesh or Inanna or the Canaanite epic cycle of Baal-Mot might provide a background for Jonah’s descent to Sheol. Although this obviously has a tendency toward “demythologization” in that God obviously controls the sea creature and the story tries not to be “mythological,” it directs a theological message for the post-exilic audience who fails to see the nature of God the Creator in a time of crisis when the *Heilsgeschichte* fails them. Even this demythologized story, which is conceptualized to convey a certain message for those who suffer from despair and distress of the historical failure of Israel in exile, is embedded in the context of the paradoxical triumph through death, when no theodicy can adequately address such an anguished history.

The story of Jonah, focusing on his stay in the belly of a big fish, is adopted as a

²⁴ Rolf P. Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology: Substance, Method, and Cases* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 188.

sign for Jesus' three-day death and the eschatological judgment in the Q saying of Jesus (Q 11:29-32//Mt 12:39-42). In this saying, Jesus' staying in "the heart of the earth" for three days, the Queen from the ends of the earth, and the rising up of the Ninevites at the time of judgment seem to allude to Jesus' work in the underworld. The "sign of Jonah" in the Q saying signifies Jesus' death experience, like Jonah's near-death experience. The *descensus* tradition appears to be eschatologically conceptualized in the Q saying of Jonah's sign that represents a mythological implication against the evil generation by way of Christ's staying in Hades during the *mortis triduum*. Interestingly in the early Christian iconography, the reclining figure of Jonah lying under the pergola assimilates that of Endymion who sleeps to remain young forever or the dead child in nakedness in the sun on pagan *sarcophagi*.²⁵ This imagery based on Greco-Roman culture appears to represent the early Christian expectation of immortality in the figure of Jonah and its interpretative saying of Jesus.

By means of further conceptualizing and theologizing the myth of the Greek descent to Hades (*nekyia*), Luke describes Jesus telling the audience of the Greco-Roman world about Hades and the afterlife judgment during his destined journey to Jerusalem. It is likely that this Lukan travel account (9:51-19:48) functions as Jesus' *nostos* ("retuning home") that is modeled on Odysseus' *nostos* and, within this narrative context, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31) serves for a Lukan *nekyia* to justify the Gentiles' acceptance as the children ("bosom") of Abraham. In the latter part of the parable which demonstrates the dialogue between Abraham and the soul of the Jewish

²⁵ André Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 32. See his section of illustrations on the story of Jonah (picture no. 2-4) and death of Endymion (picture no. 31).

rich man, Luke is somewhat polemical against the tour of hell by rejecting the request of the rich man who asks Abraham to return the blessed Lazarus so he could tell his Jewish brothers about Hades, as in Plato's story of Er in his *Republic*.

Paul's theological tendency makes of Christ's descent and ascent a Christological mythology. First he tries to see Christ's descent as "humiliation," while considering ascent as "exaltation," but rejecting the Sophia speculation of his opponents (1 Cor. 1-4). He conceptualizes Christ's *descensus*, borrowing an old docetic Christological hymn, for his assertion of Christ's humiliation and exaltation, in the so-called *Carmen Christi* (Phil. 2:6-11). Another Christological mythology that he configures from Christ's descent is related with his Jewish apocalyptic worldview of the spiritual world as well as Hellenistic cosmology. Christ's cosmic victory over the "rulers of this age" with other spiritual powers was realized through his Lordship by way of his descent and ascent, which makes possible a new life for Christians (Rom. 10: 6-9). Later, the Deutero-Pauline letters advance the cosmic Lordship and reconciliation of Christ (Eph. 1:10, 20-23; 1 Tim. 3:16) in terms of the harrowing or disarming of the evil spirits" (Col. 1:15-20; 2:15; Eph. 4:8-10).

At the end of the first century C.E., Christ's descent into Hades was also ritualized in the baptismal rite as seen in 1 Peter 3:18-22 which implies Christ's subjugating the spiritual powers of Hades, like the Sethian baptismal ritualization of the descent myth of Sophia. The context of the Petrine passage reflects the old Jewish Watcher myth that is embedded as a background to the Jewish apocalyptic worldview. Furthermore, the liturgical connotation of the baptismal descent has a common theme with Jewish Merkavah mysticism, in that the latter demonstrates the mystic journey ("descent") to the

throne of God by the mystic intermediary on behalf of the faith community.

In a different direction of conceptualization, the *descensus* tradition became spiritualized and gnosticized in the Gospel of John. Such conceptualization sees “this world” as Hades. John considers Christ’s incarnation (descent) into history as an important soteriological and Christological aspect of his theological framework. As with the Gnostic disguised descent of the savior figure, John also presents Jesus’ coming as a disguised descent into the world of darkness, for both humans and spiritual world. This disguised descent provokes much incomprehension of Jesus’ identity and nature among people and disciples. For this theological thrust, John uses the sayings of the Son of Man (1:51; 3:13-15; 6:27, 53, 62; 12:23, 34), who descends and ascends, in a distinctive Johannine way to describe the Gnostic Son of Man.

When the book of Revelation confesses Jesus Christ as the one who holds the keys of “Death and Hades” (Rev. 1:18), the myth of Christ’s descent to Hades comes to be understood more apocalyptically as the final victory over God’s rebellious enemies. As with the biblical conceptualizations of Christ’s descent into Hades from the book of Jonah to several New Testament texts, the idea continued to develop into the harrowing of hell under the cultural and mythical implications of the *Descensuskampf* or *Chaoskampf*, seen in the patristic literature and apocryphal books, in the following centuries. This development in early church history should be noted in that its final indoctrination into the creeds came to be placed as one of the Christological articulations.

My main purpose of this study is to show how the various myths of the descent into the underworld have been embedded and how their theological implications for Christ’s descent into Hades came into being through the biblical conceptualizations of the

descensus tradition in several biblical texts. Although the scholarly judgment of the scarce hints of the descent myth in the New Testament still holds true to some extent, I would argue for the diverse biblical conceptualizations and appropriations of the *descensus* tradition as a pre-Christian tradition, which is ready to be used for the New Testament writers.

A “multiple approach”²⁶ to this topic is needed because the variety of perspectives should be incorporated to take such categories as myth, legend, allegory, and story into account. This means that I should follow the synthetic exegesis of a historical and literary reading. The study of myths and their interpretation, when applied to the biblical text, requires the approach of history-of-religions as well as the history of ideas, based on the biblical texts, including the extra-canonical literature. As my goal of study involves a Christological articulation of Christ’s descent, I will also focus on a theological and historical approach to its development in early Christianity, beyond the text.

²⁶ James Barr, “Story and History in Biblical Theology,” *Theology Digest* 24/3 (1976): 265-71, argues that the approach to Biblical theology should be “multiple,” in using various methods to see the Bible as the texts as well as the ideas. This means that the Bible should be read diachronically and at the same time synchronically. Originally published in *JR* 56/1 (1976): 1-17.

CHAPTER 2

The Jewish Descent: Jonah 2

The Descent Myths and the Underworld

The eschatological hope in the New Testament has been expressed as “resurrection” and “immortality”¹ because the conquering of death in the life of the individual is the ultimate hope for humanity. Ancient Greek pessimism and the denial of the afterlife in the Hebrew Bible in general had been one cultural formation among the ancient intellectuals, even though some kind of shadowy existence in the afterlife was expected among the ordinary people in the Mediterranean world. This hope came to simply indicate the continuing existence of life after death in the next world. Whatever terms or concepts the continuing existence in the afterlife can be called, the Christian Bible came to accept the afterlife existence according to the perspective of its history of religions.

When the Hebrew Bible denies any expectation of the afterlife in the First Temple period, the concept of “Sheol” (שְׁאוֹל)² as the netherworld simply means

¹ The Greek concept of “immortality” (ἀφθαρσία) only appears in 1 Cor. 15:42; Eph. 6:24, and also in the deuterocanonical literature such as Wisdom 2:23; 6:19 and 4 Macc. 17:12, while “resurrection” (ἀνάστασις) is frequently used for the Christian eschatological expectation in the Gospels and Pauline letters, including the book of Daniel of the LXX and 2 Macc. Interestingly, Walther Eichrodt concludes his book, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, with the chapter on “the indestructibility of the individual’s relationship with God (immortality).” See his *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 496-529.

² Nicholas J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 21, maintains that it is still true that the term “Sheol” is “ein den Israeliten eigentümliches Wort für das Totenreich,” because it is not found elsewhere. He cites Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches*

“going to the grave” or “ceasing to exist in this life.”³ The first Temple period in Israel seems to have no interest in the idea of an afterlife, compared with other cultures around Israel in that “any extended discussion of life after death or the realm of the dead with its pantheon of divinities would open the door for idolatry or veneration of ghosts.”⁴ The only way to sustain human existence after death is to leave fame and progeny in the following generations.⁵

In the history of Judaism, however, the afterlife picture became elaborated and developed in the exilic and postexilic prophetic books as well as in the Jewish apocalyptic literature during the Second Temple period.⁶ It appears that, during this period, the traditional Jewish bipartite view of the cosmos (“heaven and earth”)⁷ became extended to the netherworld so that God is also the Lord of the underworld as the Creator. The theme of Jonah’s descent demonstrates this

Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament, 16th ed. (Leipzig: n.p., 1915), 796B.

³ See Ps. 31:17, 49:14, and Eccles. 9:10.

⁴ Alan F. Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 123, argues that Israel’s monotheism of YHWH tends to demythologize all forces of nature and gods and mythologize history so that the Israelites are unique among world cultures and especially strange in the ancient Near East.

⁵ Alan E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 133-53, chapter 5, “Spirits of Dead,” argues that the traditional Hebrew value of fame and prosperity through generations, demonstrated in Deut. 28, came to be challenged by the postponement or sublimation of justice and thereby later Judaism comes to calling for postmortem discrimination. While Qoheleth is much aware of the history of the development of the notion of the afterlife under the influence of foreign cultures (Eccles. 3:16-22), he asserts the traditional Hebrew value of this life with fame and posterity, like Jesus ben Sirach (Sir 30: 4-5; 41:11-13). See Segal, 248-61.

⁶ Segal, *Life after Death*, chapter 6, “Second Temple Judaism: The Rise of a Beatific Afterlife in the Bible,” 248-81.

⁷ Knierim, *Task of Old Testament Theology*, 186-91, maintains that the bipolar view of creation demonstrates the importance of Old Testament cosmology and adds that the triadic view of heaven-earth-netherworld is another option for expressing the unity of the created world.

extended perspective for his exilic and post-exilic audience by means of adopting the old Mesopotamian and Mediterranean descent myths, when the historical experience of exile shatters their faith in God the Creator. Such myths have some theological motifs and lessons by means of the journey to the netherworld. The Hebrew Bible, however, has no such epics concerning the descent to the underworld and return from it.⁸ The canonical book of Jonah only has such a motif in his experience in the belly of a sea-monster. The following epics should be taken into account for interpreting Jonah's descent.

The Gilgamesh Tradition: Acceptance of Human Mortality

It seems likely that the Hebrew Bible's pessimistic or evasive view of life after death was affected by Mesopotamian and Canaanite views. One of the oldest Mesopotamian epics is the Gilgamesh epic cycle whose origin goes back at least to the accession of the Third Dynasty of Ur, around 2100 B.C.E. and was expanded and elaborated by the Old Babylonian singers and in the Assyrian versions.⁹ The existence of variety among versions might attest to its popularity in the ancient world.¹⁰ This oral and literary tradition of Gilgamesh reflects the

⁸ Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 69.

⁹ The Gilgamesh Epic is an epic poem covering twelve tablets in its latest version and written in Akkadian, the main Semitic language of old Babylonia and Assyria, which describes the exploits of Gilgamesh, king of the Sumerian city-state Uruk. See the introduction by Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 1-22.

¹⁰ Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 35, citing Josef T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic*

solemn fact that death is the lot of all humanity, even though Gilgamesh makes a heroic journey in search of immortality.¹¹ The epic mainly demonstrates how Gilgamesh, as a human, fails to gain immortality and comes to know his state of mortality.

In the story, Gilgamesh meets the righteous Utnapishtim who survived the flood and lives “like a god” in the land of the dead in order to consult him about a means of overcoming human mortality in the wake of his friend Enkidu’s death. Gilgamesh’s journey to the realm of the dead is grand but futile because he fails Utnapishtim’s test which proves Gilgamesh’s mortality (the human cannot even stay awake a day!). Even the rejuvenating plant he gained is snatched by a serpent and thereafter he returns to Uruk with empty hands (Tablet XI).

The interesting story with various versions, which was known to the Greco-Roman world in late antiquity,¹² is that of the combat between Gilgamesh and Huwawa/Humbaba (“evil monster”). In order to liberate his people from the monstrous tyrant, Gilgamesh makes a heroic journey with his companions to the cedar forest where Huwawa lives as the guardian of the trees. Although Gilgamesh and his friend/servant Enkidu reestablishes order and peace by killing

Fragments of Qumran Cave 4 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 313 and Thomas D. Winton, ed. *Archaeology and Old Testament Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 319. This argues that the fragment of the Gilgamesh epic was unearthed at Megiddo around 1550-1150 B.C.E. when Megiddo was under Canaanite and Egyptian control and its spreading to Indo-European culture was first introduced through the Hurrian and Hittite languages. See also Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 4.

¹¹ Segal, *Life after Death*, 86.

¹² Forsyth, 42, also notes that this Gilgamesh was known to the Greco-Roman world in late antiquity, as evidenced in Aelian, a Greek writer of 170-235 C.E, who tells about Gilgamesh in a variant of the Danae story of the birth of Perseus in his book, *De natura animalium* 12.21.

Huwawa, who is a servant of Enlil (the Sumerian poem, Tablet III-V) and slaying the Bull of Heaven (the Babylonian epic) sent by Ishtar whose proposal of marriage was rejected by Gilgamesh, this results in Enkidu's death because of Gilgamesh's *hubris* (Tablet VI) and thereby he ends up dwelling in the underworld as a ghost (Tablets VII-VIII). Angry Enlil makes the seven evil powers of Huwawa persist in the world. This Gilgamesh tradition in the variants of the Huwawa narrative concludes with the human fate of mortality and the persistence of evil in the world, in spite of heroic endeavors.

Ironically in the twelfth tablet,¹³ even though two-thirds of Gilgamesh was divine (Tablet IX column ii, line 16),¹⁴ Gilgamesh dies so that he descends into the underworld to become a judge of the underworld. As a divine hero, he achieves his immortality in the underworld, unlike Utnapishtim and his wife who became immortal "like gods" without going to the underworld as an *etemmu* ("ghost"), though they were obliged to live among the dead at the mouth of the rivers.¹⁵ Gilgamesh's *apotheosis* seems to have started with the formation of the epic, though the epic itself does not explicitly demonstrate it.¹⁶ The hero Gilgamesh, traditionally known as a real historical ruler and king of the city of Uruk between 2700 and 2500 B.C.E. and the builder of the city's walls and

¹³ The last tablet has such a contradiction with the previous tablets in that Enkidu is still alive that scholars consider it as late and extraneous rather than part of the original epic. See Tigay, *Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, chapter 2, "The Integrated Epic in the Old Babylonian Period," 39-54.

¹⁴ Text from Heidel, *Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, 66.

¹⁵ Bernstein, *Formation of Hell*, 4; see also Segal, 83-91.

¹⁶ Segal evidences it from the text from Tell Haddad. See also Tigay, *Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, 14 argues that by the Ur III period (2100-2000 B.C.E.), he was regarded as king and judge of the netherworld, the role in which he was best known in Mesopotamian magic and religion in the first millennium.

temple,¹⁷ came to acknowledge that immortality is not achievable for humanity. This lesson of human mortality in the Gilgamesh tradition appears to have had an enormous impact on the cultures of the ancient Near East in such themes as human mortality and the underworld.

Descent of Inanna/Ishtar: The Unbreakable Boundary of the Underworld

The Akkadian versions, which are first attested in Late Bronze Age texts in both Babylonia and Assyria and later from the palace library of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh have a short composition of some 140 lines, ending with ritual instructions for the *taklimtu*,¹⁸ an annual ritual known from Assyrian texts, which takes place in the month (June/July) of Dumuzi (or Tammuz in Akkadian) and features the bathing, anointing, and lying-in-state in Nineveh of a statue of Dumuzi.¹⁹ What is noted in this Akkadian myth of Ishtar's descent into *Kurnugi* ("a land of no return," a Sumerian term for the underworld) is the explicit ritual for the dead Dumuzi who was substituted as a ransom for Ishtar's release from the netherworld:

¹⁷ According to the *Sumerian King List*, Gilgamesh was the fifth king of the first dynasty of Uruk; see James B. Pritchard, ed. *The Ancient Near East: Supplementary Texts and Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 266.

¹⁸ The word is a derivation from *kullumu* and means "display." It would refer to the display of the corpse of Tammuz. See Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection: "Dying and Rising Gods" in the Ancient Near East* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001), 25.

¹⁹ Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 154. The Middle Assyrian version is preserved, which means that written material takes us back to the end of the second millennium B.C.E. See Mettinger, 190.

As for Tammuz, the lover of her youth,
 Wash him with pure water, anoint him with sweet oil;
 Clothe him with a red garment, let him play on a flute of lapis
 Let courtesans ("party-girls") turn his mood.²⁰

This ritual is clearly connected to the fertility of nature because Dumuzi is considered as a shepherd-king who has a quasi-divine status.²¹ The mourning rite for Tammuz and the dead is specified in the ritual end of the Akkadian version as a late Assyrian addition,²² demonstrating "the rising both of Tammuz and of the dead as the ascent of the spirits to partake of the offerings made for the dead."²³

On the day when Dumuzi comes back up, and when the lapis lazuli pipe
 and the carnelian ring come up with him,
 When male and female mourners come up with him,
 The dead shall come up and smell the smoke offering.²⁴

This later addition to the end of the myth has been presented as related with the "funeral cult, having nothing to do with the notion of the ancient Near Eastern "dying and rising deities."²⁵ It, however, appears that even though

²⁰ See *ANET*, 109.

²¹ When Dumuzi was seized by the *galla* ("demons") of the netherworld, the produce of milk was stopped: "the churn was silent. No milk was poured. The cup was shattered. Dumuzi was no more. The sheepfold was given to the winds." This text comes from Diane Wolkstein and Samuel N. Kramer, *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 84. On the divine status of Dumuzi, see Samuel N. Kramer, "The Death of Dumuzi: A New Sumerian Version," *Anatolian Studies* 30 (1980): 5-13.

²² The ritual conclusion of the myth is properly preserved only in the Nineveh version. See Mettinger, *Riddle of Resurrection*, 24, 192.

²³ Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Additional notes on Tammuz," *JSS* 11 (1966): 10-15.

²⁴ Text from Dalley, 160.

²⁵ The category of "dying and rising gods" as well as the pattern of its mythic and ritual associations received its earliest full formation in the influential work of James G.

Dumuzi could not be categorized as “the dying and rising god,” the ritual in the end of the Akkadian version is somehow related with the new portion, announced in 1963 of the Sumerian version of the Descent of Inanna, where she decrees, in response to Dumuzi’s weeping, an arrangement whereby Dumuzi will take her place for half the year in the underworld and then return to the realm of the living; his sister, Geshtinanna, will then take Dumuzi’s place in the underworld for the other half of the year. This fate of Dumuzi’s cyclic death and renewal or “substitution-bilocation,”²⁶ in the ending, as a result of Inanna’s descent to the netherworld, reflects a transition from narrative to ritual.

Inanna/Ishtar’s descent to the underworld causes the sterility of the earth (lines 77-80) as she also experiences her own humiliation and apparent impotence in the “land of no return,” *Kurnugi*, whose name heads the Akkadian version of the myth. This heading term emphasizes the unbreakable boundary between the living and the dead. This motif is stressed in that even Inanna, Queen of Heaven, should substitute a ransom for her place in the underworld. When she resolves to descend to the underworld of her sister, Ereshkigal, motivated by the former’s desire to extend her realm (the “Great Above”) to the “Great Below”

Frazier, *The Golden Bough*, especially in its two central volumes, *The Dying God* and *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*. But Jonathan Z. Smith denies its category as exceedingly dubious because it has been based largely on Christian interest and tenuous evidence. See his dictionary article, “dying and rising Gods,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. M. Eliade, v. 4 (New York: McMillan, 1987), 521-27. Mark S. Smith even stresses the rarely ritual underpinnings for any notion of a return of the deity by arguing that “the nature of Dumuzi’s resurrection is simply unknown, and perhaps equally important it appears to go uncelebrated in any ritual manner, in his article, “The Death of ‘dying and rising gods’ in Biblical World: An Update, with Special Reference to Baal in the Baal Cycle,” *SJOT* 12 (1998): 257-313.

²⁶ Mettinger, *Riddle of Resurrection*, 192.

(lines 189-90), the trespassing into the realm of the dead cannot be left unpunished because it guarantees earthly fertility as long as the living keep undisturbed by the dead.²⁷

The ancient Near Eastern world tries to keep a far distance between the living and the dead, while the myth itself is ritually associated with the commemoration of the dead, looking for the afterlife by analogy from the natural world.²⁸ Dumuzi, despite his *apotheosis*, never becomes free from the power of the underworld, only functioning as a fertility deity or as the cultic deity for the dead.²⁹

Baal versus Mot (Death)

In the Ugaritic Baal cycle,³⁰ both the Baal-Yamm and Baal-Mot stories have been classified as cosmogonies, as battles between a divine hero and his cosmic enemy, issuing in cosmic order.³¹ In these two stories, the sequence of Baal's imprisonment, victory in battle and the proclamation of his kingship is prominent, while demonstrating that both of them have a thematic symmetry and

²⁷ Bernstein, *Formation of Hell*, 9.

²⁸ Segal, *Life after Death*, 82.

²⁹ By the 6th century B.C.E, the ritual of Tammuz was practiced in Jerusalem (Ezek. 8:14).

³⁰ The Baal cycle is generally regarded as KTU 1.1-1.6, which refers to *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places*, ed. Manfred Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquin Sanmartín. This is sometimes referred to as *CAT*. From physical evidence of the tablets excavated between 1930 and 1933, the total lines of the reconstructed of KTU amount to 1830 lines. See Mark S. Smith, the introductory chapter, in *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, vol. 1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 1-114.

³¹ Ibid., 16, citing Richard J. Clifford, "Cosmogonies in the Ugaritic Texts and in the Bible," *OR* 53 (1984): 183-201.

parallels.³² Petersen and Woodward comment on the meaning of this Baal cycle from this symmetry and parallel between the Baal-Yamm (KTU 1.1-1.2) and Baal-Mot (KTU 1.5-1.6) episodes:

Whereas the Baal-Yamm episode deals with Baal's rise over the earth, the Baal-Mot conflict uses the same logical structure to address quite different issues, the flux between life and death, fertility and sterility. The differences in characters and theme between these two episodes should not, however, obscure the structural similarity in the myths.³³

KTU 1.5-1.6 deals with the conflict between Baal and Mot, according to the sequence of Mot triumphant- Baal killed- Athtar rejected- Mot killed -Baal triumphant, which is similar to that of the conflict between Baal and Yamm (KTU 1.1-1.2). In general, Mot (personified Death) does not appear in Mesopotamian literary tradition as a stock character.³⁴ Mot in the Baal cycle, however, functions as a main character. While Yamm represents the chaotic waters, Mot signifies death as a cosmic force. The development of the Baal-Mot conflict clearly reflects and explains the seasonal changes. When Baal decides to descend to the netherworld, in reply to Mot's invitation to his underworld, whose scene is omitted as lacunae in the text, the following text implies the threat of the produce of nature as the result of Baal's death in the netherworld of Mot.

The underlying motif of this myth is that Baal as a storm god affects the fertility of nature. Even Mot is also considered as a deity of fertility according to this myth because, with Anat's vengeful enthusiasm, she reaps Mot who

³² Mark S. Smith, *Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, 17, citing Nick Wyatt, "The AB Cycle and Kingship in Ugaritic Thought," *Cosmos* 2 (1986): 136-42.

³³ David L. Petersen and M. Woodward, "Northwest Semitic Religion: A Study of Relational Structures," *UF* 9 (1977): 237-43.

³⁴ Mark S. Smith, 18.

becomes the bread of life when she splits, winnows, burns, grinds, and sows him in the field (KTU 1.6.II: 30-35). The season of drought is interpreted as Baal's periodic submission to Mot during the former's imprisonment in the netherworld, represented as "the house of seclusion" (*bt hptt*). The cycle of Baal's death and revival covers the entire agricultural year.³⁵

The general thrust of the Baal-Mot myth is that Baal is not only a dying god but also one who returns from the netherworld by overcoming Death (Mot) and resumes his royal power, even though the end of the myth implies that the combat between Baal and Mot takes place by the periodic "seventh year" (KTU 1.6.V:8-9).³⁶ Here the *descensus* is a metaphor for death, as in the myth of Inanna's descent into the netherworld. Unlike the shepherd-king Dumuzi who became "divinized" in the ritual, Baal as a god of the Ugaritic pantheon resumes his divine lordship through the experience of death. Mot's maw swallowed Baal (1.6.II:13-23). Death, however, is conquerable in this myth.³⁷

The Descent of Jonah as a Jewish Conceptualization of Creation Theology

The book of Jonah has been placed as one of the Twelve Prophets in the Hebrew Bible. Even though the anonymous author of the book seems to recount the personal experience of the historical prophetic figure of Jonah ben Amittai,

³⁵ Norman C. Habel, *Yahweh versus Baal: A Conflict of Religious Cultures* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1964), 101.

³⁶ Mettinger, *Riddle of Resurrection*, 58.

³⁷ It seems likely that Paul imagines the personified Death from "Mot with sting," when he rhetorically emphasizes the reality of resurrection as the victory over death (1 Cor. 15:54).

the story itself has been frequently considered to be fictional and non-historical. While the issue of historicity involves the interpretation of Jonah, no theological point the author made to the reader depends on it. Rather, the crisis of Israel as a distinctive nation and people at the end of the monarchial period and the exilic period might raise the question of what “the history or world as the sphere of YHWH’s historical action”³⁸ means to Israel in crisis.

For the author of the book, history or the world does not make sense to Israel elected by God, from the perspective of the *Heilsgeschichte*. How could God spare the historical enemy like the Assyrians and the Babylonians? How could God fail Israel in the end? What is the significance of Israel in the history of the world? These questions revolve around the issue of theodicy. The book of Jonah appears to be written under this agonizing matter of theodicy. If history is not conceived as the only mode of YHWH’s relationship to reality,³⁹ the author might attempt to rewrite the historical tradition of Jonah ben Amittai, by appealing to the totality of reality in experiencing God beyond history. To understand the God of Israel in totality, the descent of Jonah, who represents the new experience of Israel in encountering God the Creator, plays a role in reconstructing the theology of history and the world for rehabilitating the prophetic theology of history. Jonah’s descent could be called a new experience of the Israelites, that is, a “Jewish descent to the netherworld”⁴⁰ where history

³⁸ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 336-56.

³⁹ Knierim, *Task of Old Testament Theology*, 172.

⁴⁰ I use the term “Jewish” in that this descent is a distinctive Jewish appropriation of the descent myth by way of wisdom thinking and thereby is different from the old

does not seem to work and yet God also rules.

In this regard, the book of Jonah functions as a key connection between the prophetic attitude of God's existence and involvement in history on the one hand, and the wisdom theology of human experience of life and death on the other.⁴¹ While Jonah's experience of death and Sheol in the belly of the fish from the descent story and his psalm sung in Sheol are mostly unique, and cannot be found in any Scriptural tradition, the content of the psalm is more likely to be seen as the first part of the typical lament psalms sung in the cultic setting. In the following section, I would argue how Jonah's descent is mythically configured in terms of *mythopoesis* ("making of myth") and how the author uses a myth of the descent into the underworld to conceptualize the historical experience of Israel in crisis by way of emphasis on the Temple.

Literary Perspective

Prophetic Narrative with Wisdom Motifs. Jonah's experience of being swallowed by a great fish has been one of the amazing stories of the prophets among Biblical stories. This story contributes largely to the high improbability in the historicity of Jonah, because it lacks the prophetic oracle which is the most important type of prophetic material,⁴² but rather includes a "prophetic narrative"⁴³

descent myths of other surrounding cultures.

⁴¹ Gerhard F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 69.

⁴² Elmer Dyck, "Jonah among the Prophets: A Study in Canonical Context," *JETS* 33/1 (1990): 64.

about the prophet himself. Most of Israelite prophecy is based on the events of history. But in Jonah, there is little evidence for any grounding of the historical Ninevites who repent of their evil lives by Jonah's prophetic activity in the narrative. Furthermore, it has been accepted that the book of Jonah was written after the fall of the historical Nineveh, and its obvious and repeated parodic attempts from other previous literary works as pre-texts demonstrate Jonah as a later literary work.⁴⁴

If Jonah is the product of the post-exilic period, which was written to communicate with an audience who knew the parodied texts of the Hebrew Bible, readers will encounter the messages of the author through the discourse of how the texts are parodied from the prophetic traditions and theological implications of the *Heilsgeschichte* in the history of Israel. Through this discourse, the author takes such literary features as characterization, parody, satire, irony, and so on. These literary aspects employed in Jonah indicate some shift from history to story and wisdom in the process of development of the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁵ This shift to

⁴³ Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 175. Meir Sternberg defines narrative as "a functionalist structure, a means to a communicative end, a transaction between the narrator and the audience on whom he wishes to produce a certain effect by way of certain strategies," in his book, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 1. Robert Alter sees Biblical narrative as "prose fiction," claiming that though Biblical writers were motivated by a sense of high theological purpose, they wrote by vivid characterization, word play, and type scenes. See his book, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 155-56. For more details of the literary genre of prophetic narrative, see Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39 with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 18-20.

⁴⁴ Arnold J. Band, "Swallowing Jonah: The Eclipse of Parody," *Prooftexts* 10 (1990): 179.

⁴⁵ Krister Stendahl, "The Bible as a Classic and the Bible as Holy Scripture," *JBL*

the literary and wisdom concern in biblical scholarship in general is also recognized by Perdue.⁴⁶ Although the literary framework of Jonah begins with the traditional prophetic discourse of the prophetic calling of Jonah by YHWH (“the word of YHWH came to Jonah, son of Amittai”), the whole literary work is a narrative in which a series of narrated events center on Jonah himself and his prophetic environments.⁴⁷ More significantly, the book of Jonah reveals some parallels with wisdom literature, like that of Job, in that both of them achieve their theological purposes of the theme of theodicy through dialogue between God the Creator as the accused on the one hand, and Jonah and Job as the plaintiffs arguing the issue of God’s nature.

As Roffey notes, some wisdom motifs are easily found in Jonah such as “seeking to make sense of human actions and the world as part of God’s design”;⁴⁸ judgment and repentance, punishment and mercy, and God’s concern for the world and human beings in history. If wisdom themes in Jonah are more or less recognized in terms of its self-critical approach to reality, traditions, and history, this wisdom influence on Jonah should be taken into account. James L.

103 (1984): 3-4, argues that Biblical scholarship has shifted to Bible as story, theology as story, with the focus on languages and forms of literary criticism. Jonah’s literary perspective has long since been recognized as a narrative.

⁴⁶ Leo G. Perdue, *The Collapse of History: Reconstructing Old Testament Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1994).

⁴⁷ Frank Zimmermann argues for the compiler’s mistake in that two traditions of Jonah (younger Jonah in chs. 3-4 and old Jonah in 1-2) has been mistakenly put one before the other, in his article, “Problems and Solutions in the Book of Jonah,” *Judaism* 40 (1991): 580-89. But I think that the narrative does not preclude the consecutive order of the events in a literary framework. Rather Jonah’s story seems to achieve the author’s communicative end in the last chapter of the dialogue between God and Jonah.

⁴⁸ John W. Roffey, “God’s Truth, Jonah’s Fish: Structure and Existence in the Book of Jonah,” *ABR* 36 (1988): 11.

Crenshaw sees that wisdom may be defined as “the quest for self-understanding in terms of relationships with things, people, and the Creator,” which has three levels: nature wisdom, juridical and *Erfahrungsweisheit* (wisdom of experience), and theological wisdom.⁴⁹ The last level of wisdom, that is, “theological wisdom”⁵⁰ can be defined as “moving in the realm of theodicy” and in so doing it affirms God as the ultimate meaning of historical existence and reality.⁵¹

Roffey continues to argue that even though Jonah can be found in the relationship between prophecy and history, the lack of historical grounding in Jonah (little evidence of the repentant historical Nineveh) should be considered, with the effect that the reader or audience is to choose a different reading of Jonah in light of “narrative prophecy with concerns beyond a particular historical movement,” but not as “historical prophecy.”⁵²

The necessity of the literary reading is especially shown in that the story of the fish plays an important role in understanding the whole book of Jonah. According to W. Rudolph, the book of Jonah plays a role of “example” (*Beispiel*) and “narrative story” (*Gleichniserzählung*) rather than a “historical report” (*historischen Bericht*).⁵³ This literary character of the book is certainly evinced in the story of the big fish. Rudolf argues for this as follows:

⁴⁹ James L. Crenshaw, “Method in Determining Wisdom Influence upon ‘Historical’ Literature,” *JBL* 88 (1969): 129-42, maintains that a distinction between wisdom literature (Proverbs, Qoheleth, Job, Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon, and Wisdom of Psalms), wisdom tradition, wisdom movement (*paideia*), and wisdom thinking should be made, for these terms refer to the literary deposit of a specifically defined movement characterized by a particular approach.

⁵⁰ Ronald J. Williams, “Theodicy in the Ancient Near East,” *CJT* 2/1 (1956): 14-26.

⁵¹ Crenshaw, 132.

⁵² Roffey, “God’s Truth, Jonah’s Fish,” 12.

⁵³ Wilhelm Rudolph, *Joel-Amos-Obadja-Jona* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1971), 350.

The narrator makes no attempt to define the animal, though it is described as even “a big fish.” YHWH just employs it to save Jonah. It is a little thing for Him to prepare it so that a man was swallowed undamaged and stayed a few days and could come back safe. The author of the book of Jonah doubtlessly knew those sagas and myths concerning devouring and saving fish, which had been transmitted in the Mediterranean area and somewhere else and localized in the region of Joppa. The author came to employ them by his motivation to fashion the stories into YHWH’s religion in such a way that it served for the praise for YHWH’s wonderwork.⁵⁴

Jonah must be read from the perspective that the author is not concerned with particular historical moments like the historical Nineveh and the historical prophecy of Jonah. Rather the author concerns himself with the question of theodicy in the exilic and post-exilic period from a “Judean perspective,”⁵⁵ which might be categorized as “theological wisdom” pursuing the meaning of the historical existence of Israel in relation to God the Creator. It appears that the fate of Nineveh is beyond the theological scope of the author, but the main argument of the author is a theological wisdom demonstrated in the dialogue between God the Creator and the historical Judean community who experienced the destruction of nationhood and the Temple by a foreign empire, by way of a prophetic narrative on the northern figure of Jonah, “a figure of irony and parody.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Rudolph, 349-50. My translation from the German text.

⁵⁵ Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, vol. 1 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000), 317-18, argues that the narrative is written from a “Judean perspective” about a northern prophet and his relation to YHWH. It is important to note that Jonah’s prayer indicates that he is present in the Jerusalem Temple and reflects the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. Cf. Rudolph, 348.

⁵⁶ John C. Holbert, “Deliverance Belongs to Yahweh: Satire in the Book of Jonah,” *JSOT* 21 (1981): 63.

Such a theological wisdom is first indicated in Jonah's name itself. Jonah means "dove," which is used for the metaphor of Israel in the book of Hosea to signify Israel's "senselessness and fickleness" (7:11-12) as well as "its ultimate return to YHWH" (11:11).⁵⁷ In Gen. 8:6-12, a dove played a flying agent to observe God's judgment and re-creation by flying over the flooded world after the Noachic Flood.

Jonah as a prophetic narrative with wisdom motifs finds its canonical status among the Twelve Prophets because it is acceptable, in that the theological tension suggested and created by the author between God the Savior for the election of Israel and God's *Hesed* (חֶסֶד) for the whole world as the Creator, leads the historical community of the Judeans, involved in reading and hearing the text, to a new level of understanding God of Israel and creation, by way of raising the issue of theodicy: Was God righteous?⁵⁸

Literary Placement of Jonah's Psalm. The book of Jonah has only forty-eight verses as a whole. But its literary style and contents are not so easy to categorize into a genre.⁵⁹ The eighth-century Jonah from Gath-hepher, son of

⁵⁷ Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets*, 1:309.

⁵⁸ *Contra* John Day who argues that it is questionable whether the marked character of Jonah's story had wisdom influence because in spite of Jonah's creation theology and universalism it is lacking in the distinctive vocabulary of the wisdom literature and contains no literary echoes of the wisdom corpus. See his article "Problem in the Interpretation of the Book of Jonah," *OTS* 24 (1990): 39. Professor Sweeney comments on the importance of this theodicy issue. See also Hans W. Wolff, "Jonabuch" in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Kurt von Gallig, 3rd ed., vol. 3 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1959), 854-55.

⁵⁹ The question of Jonah's genre has often been raised. Such literary genres as satire, parody, parable, allegory, midrash, didactic story, *diasporanovella*, didactic history, ironic

Amittai, has been considered to be the main character of the book because the same name of the prophet is mentioned as ben Amittai in 2 Kings 14:25, even though his prophetic actions were not detailed in 2 Kings. But the book of Jonah itself contains little historical information and social setting of the story. As Tribble notices, “historical criticism struggles without resolution to determine author, date, setting, and purpose.”⁶⁰ Thus she points out some limits of other branches of criticism in studying Jonah. Although she uses the book of Jonah to teach rhetorical criticism, she thinks that the literary artistic features of the book fit well with her rhetorical criticism. The text-centered focus for meaning and the synchronic reading of a final form of the text are the main methodological emphasis of rhetorical criticism. But as she argues, it allows for diachronic reflection through conversation with textual criticism, historical criticism, and redaction criticism.⁶¹ The problem remains whether or not rhetorical criticism can apply to all biblical texts or discourses. It seems that the book of Jonah itself reveals its rhetorical discourse in the nature of its content and the emphasis on rhetorical faith.

As Tribble argues, the synchronic reading of Jonah which allows for

short story, legend, philosophical treatise, tragedy, and comedy came out from scholarship on Jonah. See the overview of Kenneth M. Craig, Jr., “Jonah in Recent Research,” *Current in Research* 7 (1999): 104; Millar Burrows, “The Literary Category of the Book of Jonah,” in *Translating and Understanding the Old Testament: Essays in Honor of Herbert G. May*, ed. Harry T. Frank and William L. Reed (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), 80-107. The problems and scholarly views on Jonah’s genre have been comprehensively dealt in Thomas M. Bolin, *Freedom beyond Forgiveness: The Book of Jonah Re-Examined* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 46-53.

⁶⁰ Phyllis Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 108.

⁶¹ Ibid., 94.

diachronic reflection is a valuable exegetical exercise. Most importantly, the commonly-accepted two balancing parts to the book (chs. 1-2 and 3-4) is a part of Tribble's external design which focuses on its symmetrical structure as a whole. This easy division is made because of the second commission of Jonah by YHWH which is signified by the word, שְׁנִיית ("a second time") in 3:1. The following second half of the book parallels the first half in its themes and appearance of characters. The presence of the psalm (2:3-10, Hebrew text verses) becomes a problem in the symmetrical structure because of Jonah's lengthy psalm sung from the belly of the fish. While some scholars contend that the psalm supports the design, Tribble argues for the psalms' dissonance in the structure.⁶²

R. Smend argues that the problem of the literary unity (*Einheitlichkeit*) and the exceptional position (*Sonderstellung*) of Jonah's psalm in 2:3-10 indicate its insertion into the complete book of Jonah.⁶³ Furthermore, as Gunkel points, "the multiple references to the Temple as the goal (*Zielpunkt*) of the expectation and to the vow of sacrifice" (*das Globen von Opfern*, 2:10) presuppose the cultic situation of the Temple.⁶⁴ Yet the scholarly argument of the literary unity of the psalm is still in debate, whether the psalm belongs to the original story, though

⁶² Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 114-15, 161, maintains that the imbalance due to the psalm in the first half of the book (chs. 1-2) is balanced by the lengthy dialogue between YHWH and Jonah in ch. 4. She ponders its dissonance because the isolation of the chiasm in 2:1, 2, and 11 shows her rhetorical method at work on a putative earlier text.

⁶³ Rudolf Smend, *Die Entstehung des Alten Testaments* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1978), 177.

⁶⁴ Hermann Gunkel, *Ausgewählte Psalmen* (Göttingen: n.p., 1911), 289.

the current state is shifting to argue for its originality.⁶⁵ Tribble's methodological emphasis on the favorite rhetorical device of chiasm (A-B-B'-A') in 2:1, 2, and 11, apart from the psalm, seems to disregard the thematic integrity of the prayer, which strengthens the characterization of Jonah and the saving event of Nineveh in the latter half of the book.

In contrast to Tribble's position,⁶⁶ I propose that the psalm belongs to the original story, whether the author composed it or not. In its plot development, the theme of the prayer is so important that the narrator continues the theme of the prayer into the event at Nineveh and the dialogue between YHWH and Jonah. Furthermore, the present literary context of the Temple setting from a "Judean perspective" is important enough to see a literary and theological unity as the final text of Jonah stands.⁶⁷ As Wendland argues, the midpoint of the entire book in terms of word count occurs in 2:8, the middle of the psalm.⁶⁸ At this point, Jonah's movement of "going down" (יָרַד) to Joppa, the ship, the hold of the ship, the belly of the fish, and finally Sheol stops and begins to return to the presence of YHWH, even though he still remains reluctant to fulfill his commission.

In the plot development, this change of movement seems so significant in

⁶⁵ Phyllis Tribble, "The Book of Jonah: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 7, *Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature, Daniel, the Twelve Prophets*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 464.

⁶⁶ For more scholarly reasons for seeing Jonah's psalm as a separate unit or an independent composition, see Hans W. Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, trans. M. Kohl, Continental Commentaries (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 128-31.

⁶⁷ Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets*, 55n, 1:317, n. 55.

⁶⁸ Ernst R. Wendland, "Text Analysis and the Genre of Jonah," part 2, *JETS* 39/3 (1996): 378.

demonstrating the word, וַתַּעַל (2:7b, “But you brought up”). This movement culminates in the exclamation, יְשׁוּעָתָה לַיהוָה (“salvation to YHWH!,” 2:10c). This proclamation or confession appears to reflect that the prayer is answered by the *Heilsorakel* (salvation oracle), which is usually seen in lament psalms.⁶⁹ The lament psalm shows a transition from lament to praise at the point when an oracle is heard or prayer answered.⁷⁰ Then the mood becomes a thanksgiving song (declarative praise, תִּירוּדָה).⁷¹ According to Gunkel, such a psalm can be categorized as *Klagelieder des Einzelnen* (individual lament psalm), which has such a characteristic order as the wailing, almost desperate lament and the passionate prayer and then the certainty of deliverance in a jubilant tone.⁷² From this perspective, Jonah’s psalm has such a transition from lament to praise, when his prayer turns to YHWH’s holy Temple (2:8, the midpoint of the book). The Temple and the oracle of salvation culminate in the prayer. The key theme is expressed for plot development: “salvation to YHWH!”

⁶⁹ Many scholars see this psalm as a thanksgiving psalm. But I figure that this prayer is likely to be a latter part of the lament psalm in which the dramatic change of mood begins with “salvation oracle.” It seems to me that “salvation to YHWH” is the salvation oracle as an answer to the supplicant’s prayer. Joachim Begrich proposes that in the cultic liturgy, the formal speaker (priest or king) speaks a “salvation oracle” which is a precise answer to the lament of the supplicant. See his article, “Das priesterliche Heilsorakel,” *ZAW* 52 (1934): 81-92. For *Gattung* (psalm-type), see Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms, A Form-Critical Introduction*, tran. Thomas M. Horner (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).

⁷⁰ This transition is also found in the whole theological structure of the book of Psalms where it begins with psalms of lament in the first half of the book and ends with psalms of praise in the second. For this structural movement, see Patrick D. Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 14.

⁷¹ For a literary technique and function concerning lament and thanksgiving character of the psalm, see Peter Weimar, “Jon 2,1-11: Jonapsalm und Jonaerzählung,” *BZ* 28/1 (1984): 43-68.

⁷² Gunkel, *Psalms*, 20.

Without this underlying key theme, there is no good reason to detail the content of the psalm for the authorial intent. Now the narrator is ready to tell what happens to the great city of Nineveh and how this key theme develops through the dialogue between YHWH and Jonah.

The Jewish Descent to the Netherworld in Jonah's Song

De-historicization and Re-mythologization from Wisdom Thinking.

Jonah's story begins with God's commissioning him to preach God's judgment. This pattern is similar to the general pattern of God's appointing his prophets in the prophetic traditions. But Jonah's attempt to escape from the face of God by way of "going to Tarshish" is unexpected by the readers who have known the prophetic tradition. The way in which the author introduces the story of the prophet is similar to and yet different from other prophetic literatures.⁷³ It appears that the author sets up a theological setting for his understanding of the God of Israel. This journey goes not only beyond the scope of the land of Israel by boarding the ship of the Gentiles, but also beyond the ordered human world. Jonah's fleeing journey to Tarshish (the western end of the world?), which symbolizes the place beyond God's creation,⁷⁴ makes the story develop into

⁷³ Jonah's resistance to God's commission can be compared with other prophets' resistance when they are called, who have different reasons to be reluctant to God's call; Moses (Exod. 3:11, 4:10), Elijah (1 Kings 19:3), Jeremiah (Jer. 1:6), Isaiah (Isa. 6:9-13), and Amos (Amos 7:2). After all, these prophets accomplish the prophetic commissions to preach the divine oracles; even Jonah finally preaches the five-word oracle to the Ninevites (3:4). See Tribble, "The Book of Jonah," 480-81.

⁷⁴ The location of Tarshish has not been known, even though many scholars try to locate it in several places. But whether it points to a certain geographical place, the biblical reference to it in Isa. 66:14 signifies a remote place which "has not heard of

Jonah's final encounter with God, who will have a revelatory dialogue with Jonah. In this literary scope, the book of Job has a similar literary structure in that God is finally revealed to Job in a dialogue.

The journey motif is possibly constructed in order to de-historicize the experience of the Israelites in crisis who have struggled to come to grips with the meaning of history for the national failure and disaster in the exilic and post-exilic period, as a way of adopting the popular descent myths in which Gilgamesh, Inanna, or Baal descended to the underworld.⁷⁵ For them, history is a history of election and salvation. But when history fails them, every theology seems to collapse. If one accepts E. Jacob's thesis that the Old Testament has a radical tendency of demythologization of the cosmos (place) in favor of the actualization of God's action in the history of Israel (time),⁷⁶ the failure of Israel in the history of the nation is difficult to understand. From the perspective of the author, the traditional theology of the *Heilsgeschichte*, like that of von Rad,⁷⁷ does not fit into his observations on the reality of Israel's experience. A new dimension of understanding God's action in history in general, rather than the

God's reputation or witnessed God's glorious presence." It appears to refer to the opposite western direction, opposite from Nineveh. See Jack M. Sasson, *Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary, and Interpretations* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 78-80. Cf. Moshe Elat, "Tarshish and the Problem of Phoenician Colonisation in the Western Mediterranean," *OLP* 13 (1982): 55-69.

⁷⁵ Symbolically, the theme of "descent" (יִרַד) is used for the plot of Jonah's journey.

⁷⁶ Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. Arthur W. Heathcote and Philip J. Allcock (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 201. See also Gerhard von Rad, "Some Aspects of the Old Testament World-view," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch: And Other Essays*, trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 144-65.

⁷⁷ See Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Bd. I, *Die Theologie der geschichtlichen Überlieferungen Israels*, 2nd ed. (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1958), 111-34.

history of Israel in particular, is needed for the totality of experiencing God. The way in which the author sets a different literary genre other than the prophetic traditions is that Jonah is described as a provocative and recalcitrant prophet who rejects his commission from God.

It seems likely that Jonah's fish story is used to regenerate the mythological language on the surface in order to explore the author's wisdom reflection on God the Creator's involvement in the order of creation. This kind of literary work operates in an opposite direction to the general tendency of historicization of myths in the Hebrew Bible. Related to this general tendency, Jacob makes an example of this historicization of the combat myth:

Like all the peoples of antiquity, Israel knew many myths which came from its own background or from neighboring peoples with whom Israel had been in contact, but the majority of these myths no longer exist except in a fragmentary form or in allusions, for history has caused them to undergo a transformation which sometimes went as far as complete disappearance. It was thus that Israel knew some creation myths which, like Babylonian or Phoenician myths, spoke of an original struggle between two opposing deities; through certain poetic texts we can picture this myth as a struggle between Yahweh and two sea monsters, Rahab and Leviathan, the victorious outcome of which allowed him to organize heaven and earth (Ps. 74.12-17; 89.10-13; Isa. 51.9-10; Job 26.10-12; 38.1-11; Ps. 104.26). But faith in the God of history made Rahab into an historical reality, Egypt; Leviathan became a beast that Yahweh made completely subject to his authority (Ps. 104.26); the Tiamat of the Babylonian myth became the *tehom*, that is, the sea.⁷⁸

While it is noted that all the mythical references are found only in relatively late texts, Jacob goes on to say that the fragmentary allusions of the cosmogonic myths constitute no danger of Israel's falling back into mythology because the prophet deliberately put the traditions of the cosmogonic myths at the service of

⁷⁸ Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 197.

history.⁷⁹ The de-mythologization as a conceptual historicization derives from the faith of Israel that the world is a created order, held and governed by God under whom natural forces are always controlled. Jonah's story of the fish, however, seems to fall back into mythologizing the experience of the prophet, what I shall call "remythologizing" for wisdom speculation. As a communicative tool, this remythologization serves to reorient the historical Jewish community toward their encountering the God of creation beyond history.⁸⁰ In this regard, I call this communicative reorientation "de-historicization" so that a new theological interpretation on the seemingly failed history of the nation can be accessible to the historical Jewish community in crisis. This kind of reorientation needs mythical language to describe God the Creator, as in the wisdom dialogue between God and Job.

Myths Embedded in the Story of the Fish and the Song from Sheol.

Many scholars who discuss the genre of Jonah find it difficult to arrive at a scholarly consensus as to the problem of the genre because of its unique character within the canon. It appears that its satirical, comic, ironic features become more complicated because of the existence of the fish story. Even though some scholars mention its mythical background behind the story in chs. 1-2, most of them have overlooked it without further seeking the meaning of its mythical embodiment in the story.

⁷⁹ Jacob, 198.

⁸⁰ The author's reorienting of the historical Jewish community appears to be related with building the Temple community, whether or not the Jerusalem Temple still exists.

The name of Jonah (יוֹנָה) only occurs in 2 Kings 14:25-27 where “in his homeland” (Jonah 4:2) he prophesies the expansion of Israel’s border under Jeroboam ben Jehoash in spite of the king’s wickedness. The relationship of two texts between Jonah and the Deuteronomistic history has been noted in terms of the reasoning that just as God shows mercy to Israel, even when deserving punishment because of the sins of Jeroboam (2 Kings 14:24), God is also merciful to the Ninevites who are equally worthy of punishment.⁸¹ When Jonah begins his long speech to YHWH, he makes a reference to an earlier remark made in his homeland before he fled his divine commission. From a narrative-critical standpoint, it can be said that 4:2 refers to a prior event beyond the scope of the story, as an inter-textual concern.⁸² As the earlier motivation is not revealed until 4:2, the author of Jonah might attempt to draw on the Deuteronomistic briefing of the northern prophet, Jonah, when the introduction of the book of Jonah begins with וַיְהִי (apocopated ו-consecutive imperfect of הָיָה). This usage in the first beginning of the book appears only in Jonah and Ezekiel. This abrupt introduction makes some scholars think that Jonah is a midrash to the earlier lost source or to 2 Kings 14.⁸³ Jonah’s name in the Deuteronomistic focal point, in which the northern Israelite crisis caused by the Aramean invasions seemed to be finally resolved by Jeroboam ben Jehoash, which was prophesied by Jonah ben Amittai, presupposes its familiarity to the audience, when it starts with

⁸¹ Bolin, *Freedom beyond Forgiveness*, 73; cf. Sasson, *Jonah*, 344.

⁸² Bolin, 151.

⁸³ Ibid., 74. For Jonah as a midrash, see his brief sketch of such scholars as Karl Budde, Hugo Winckler, and Phyllis Trible; see 144 n, 49.

ויהי, relating it to 2 Kings 14 as an inter-textual relation.

The fish story, however, rejects such a historical connectedness between two texts. Rather it points in an unexpected direction toward the mythological descent narrative of Jonah.⁸⁴ It is noted that the gender change of Jonah's fish occurs twice: a male fish (דג, 2:1) is commanded to swallow Jonah who stays in his belly; the female fish in whose belly Jonah prays (דגה, 2:2); the male fish who is commanded to vomit Jonah (2:11). Scholars consider these gender changes as its evidence for the insertion of the song into the narrative.⁸⁵ Regardless of this, the author makes a literary unit just before YHWH's commission to Jonah (3:1):

But YHWH provided a large fish (דג) to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. (2:1, MT verse)

Then YHWH spoke to the fish (דג), and it spewed Jonah out upon the dry land. (2:11)

This literary unit creates an *inclusio* for YHWH's control over nature, Jonah's near-death experience, and deliverance. Although linguistic diversity in the appearance of different divine names in Jonah ("YHWH," "Elohim," "Ha-Elohim," "YHWH-Elohim") is noted among scholars,⁸⁶ the use of the divine name YHWH

⁸⁴ The study of mythological imagination involved in the fish story (fish as an enemy, savior, or underworld) was done in Hans Schmidt, *Jona, Eine Untersuchung zur vergleichenden Religionsgeschichte* (Göttingen: n.p., 1907), which expands its study to the comparative religion and the folktales of nature, summarized in Rüdiger Lux, *Jona, Prophet zwischen Verweigerung und Gehorsam: Eine erzählanalytische Studie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 24-25.

⁸⁵ Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 157-60.

⁸⁶ Tribble, "Book of Jonah," 464, argues that although the differences are in some instances "explainable," in others they appear "arbitrary." Cf. Cornelius B. Houk, "Linguistic Patterns in Jonah," *JSOT* 77 (1998): 90, claims that the inconsistency of the

in the fish event (2:1, 11) and the song (2:3-10), and the dialogue between YHWH and Jonah (4:1-4) is distinctive and natural. The fish event related to Jonah the prophet dominantly uses the divine name YHWH, while it is noted that a more general, universal name for God is used for the Ninevites and their moral repentances (3:5-10).⁸⁷ When the author of Jonah keeps in mind the image of the Creator, he specifically uses the name, Elohim, Ha-Elohim or YHWH-Elohim in 4:6-9, followed by the verb מָנָה (“appoint,” “provide”):

(4:6) וַיִּמָּן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים קִיקִיּוֹן

(4:7) וַיִּמָּן הָאֱלֹהִים תּוֹלַעַת

(4:8) וַיִּמָּן אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ קָדִים

In this specific scene of Jonah under the self-made booth, the author describes God the Creator as controlling such natural things as a castor-oil plant, a worm, an east wind at His will. Within this theological framework, emphasizing the divine authority of the Creator over nature, the fish event also demonstrates the Creator's omnipotence in pursuing the fleeing recalcitrant prophet, Jonah who descended (יָרַד) into the hold of the ship, by way of appointing a great fish to swallow him. The divine name of YHWH with a following verb מָנָה is first introduced in this mythical fish event:

(2:1a) וַיִּמָּן יְהוָה הָגָג גָּדוֹל לִבְלֹעַ אֶת־יוֹנָה

divine name implies multiple authorship.

⁸⁷ John Day, “Problems in the Interpretation of the Book of Jonah,” *OTS* 24 (1990): 43, notes that the book of Job also uses the divine name YHWH for the prologue, epilogue and introductions to the two divine speeches, while more general terms for the deity, El, Eloah, Elohim, and Shaddai are employed when the foreigner Job and his friends are in dialogue.

Although it appears to be arbitrary for the Gentile sailors to call the name of YHWH, contrasted with the Ninevites' calling to Elohim, the sailors come to recognize that Jonah is fleeing from YHWH (1:10), when he confesses, "I fear YHWH, God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land" (1:9). The Gentile recognition of the providence of YHWH makes them begin Yahwistic worship: "Then they feared (יָרָא) YHWH a great fear (יִרְאָה) and offered a sacrifice to YHWH, and vowed vows" (1:16). The raging and calming of the sea (יָם) by YHWH leads the Gentile sailors to fear YHWH. Immediately after this divine wonder (ch.1), the author describes another wonder in terms of the mythical language of the fish event in which the divine name YHWH is also used for the prophet's encountering death and chaos.

The setting for Jonah's song (2:3-10) is quickly sketched: a three-day sojourn within a large fish.⁸⁸ The LXX adopts a third declension, τὸ κῆτος for דָּג or דָּגָה. This term supposes a large sea creature. Although the term originally refers to the general class of fish in the sea (Gen. 9:2; Num. 11:22; Ps. 8:9), the masculine "a great fish" דָּג גָּדוֹל, swallowing and vomiting Jonah, seems to denote the masculine forms of such sea monsters as a "sea-serpent" (נָחָשׁ, Amos 9:3), Rahab (רָהַב, Job 9:13, 26:12; Ps. 87:4, 89:11; Isa. 30:7, 51:9), Leviathan (לִיָּתָן, Job 3:8, 41:1; Ps. 74:14, 104:26; Isa. 27:1), and a "sea-monster" or "dragon" (תַּנִּינִי, Gen. 1:21; Job 7:12; Ps. 74:13, 91:13; Isa. 27:1, 51:9; Ezek. 29:3,

⁸⁸ Bolin, *Freedom beyond Forgiveness*, 106-17, also notes that there is no instance in the Old Testament apart from Jonah where a noun changes gender in a midstream.

32:2). The great fish is appointed as God's agent that pursues the fleeing prophet.⁸⁹ This narrative tries to de-mythologize the mythical sea-monster in avoiding the names of the above-mentioned mythical sea-monsters. God's omnipotence over the sea-monsters is repeatedly mentioned in Scripture:

By his power he stilled the Sea; by his understanding he struck down *Rahab*. (Job 26:12)

In that day, the LORD will punish with his sword, his fierce, great and powerful sword, *Leviathan* the gliding serpent, *Leviathan* the coiling serpent; he will slay the *monster* of the sea. (Isa. 27:1)

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD! Awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago! Was it not you who cut *Rahab* in pieces, who pierced the *dragon*? (Isa. 51:9)

You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the *dragons* in the waters. You crushed the heads of *Leviathan*; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness. (Ps. 74:13-14)

The authors' poetic words in these books describe how the mythical sea-monsters have been tamed by YHWH who proclaims His lordship and kingship over creation by way of overpowering the chaotic sea-creatures. The power of sea-imagery following 2:1 might reflect the combat myth between Baal and Yamm (Sea) in the Baal epic of Ugarit or between Marduk and Tiamat in the Babylonian cosmogonic myth. The former conquered the latter and built his palace that would befit his kingship over other gods. The cycle of Baal and Anat also includes the conflict with Mot (Death).⁹⁰ According to Fontenrose's

⁸⁹ George M. Landes, "The Kerygma of the Book of Jonah: the Contextual Interpretation of the Jonah Psalm," *Interpretation* 21 (1967): 13, argues that the fish is the instrument of the prophet's deliverance from the sea rather than a punishment on Jonah.

⁹⁰ Joseph Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and Its Origins* (Berkeley:

comprehensive study of the combat myth, the sea-dragon combat myth was popular in Greece as well as in the Near East,⁹¹ as the sea is identified with the realm of death or the origin of gods.⁹²

Landes argues that Jonah's staying in the belly of the fish "three days and three nights" (2:1) has its typical mythological background as seen in the Sumerian myth of "the descent of Inanna to the netherworld."⁹³ While he maintains that three days and three nights are intended for Inanna to cover the time of the travel to "the land of no return" (*Ganzir* in Sumerian, *Kurnugi* in Akkadian),⁹⁴ Bolin argues that it illustrates the practice in which a period of waiting is observed after death to ensure that the individual is truly dead and to prevent premature burial.⁹⁵ In connection with the description of the size of the city Nineveh as "three-day journey" (3:3), Jonah's three-day downward journey to the underworld gives a literary setting for the song from Sheol.

University of California Press, 1959), 129-38.

⁹¹ Ibid., 143-45, argues that coincidence of theme and scene makes it probable that the Greek, Hittite, and Canaanite myths are all variants of one story of combat between god and monstrous enemy (sea-monster). For the combat myth in Mesopotamia, see 146-76. Cf. Forsyth, chapter 2, "The Dragon and the Sea: Ancient Near Eastern Combats," *Old Enemy*, 44-66.

⁹² Hesiod finds the origin of most gods in the depth of the sea, in his *Theogony* 338-70.

⁹³ George M. Landes, "The 'Three Days and Three Nights' Motif in Jonah 2.1," *JBL* 86 (1967): 446-50. In this myth, the goddess Inanna, before her journey to the netherworld, commands her servant Ninshubur to sing a lament for her only after she has been gone three days.

⁹⁴ Bernstein, *Formation of Hell*, 8. Sometimes the underworld which Ereshkigal rules is called as *Cutha*. The term for the underworld in the Hebrew Bible in this sense could be "Abbadon" (אַבְדֹּון), or "the land of forgetfulness" (Ps. 88:11-12).

⁹⁵ Bolin, 108. For the text of the myth of Inanna's descent, see Samuel Noah Kramer, "Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld: Continued and Revised," *JCS* 5 (1951): 1-14.

The near-death experience for “three days and three nights” does not suppose that the fish can be just seen as favorable rather than hostile, unlike the point for which Landes argues.⁹⁶ Rather, I would argue that the author has in mind the chaotic figure of the sea-monster from Jonah’s death or Sheol experience in the belly of the fish.⁹⁷ This experience is described in terms of Jonah as a “typical Israelite” rather than a “typical hero” for communication with a certain group of implied readers.⁹⁸ In the myth, a hero, or a champion god, is expected by the audience to conquer the chaotic monster or the antagonist god, usually seen in the descent or combat myths. But the failed Jonah is identified with the implied audience for the preparation of the next event of Nineveh whose cuneiform writing of the city name (NINA) is the combination of the sign ÈŠ (“temple,” or “house”) and HA (“fish”), from which the author of Jonah might want to indicate the story of Jonah.⁹⁹

The psalm sung in the belly of the fish is like a song of distress and from the experience of Sheol. His experience in the middle of the chaotic and cosmic

⁹⁶ Landes, “Three Days and Three Nights,” 450, argues that before Jonah is swallowed by the fish, he is threatened by the sea and in danger of permanent residence in the netherworld. But he misses the point of the literary setting in which Jonah in the belly is identified with the Sheol experience.

⁹⁷ Later in Jewish mysticism, the *Zohar*, a main text of the Jewish mystic, Kabbala, interprets Jonah’s descent experience in the belly of the fish in the sea as the journey of the soul which is imprisoned in the body and in the world (II, 198-99). See Uwe Steffen, *Die Jona-Geschichte: Ihre Auslegung und Darstellung im Judentum, Christentum und Islam* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, ~~Verlag~~, 1994), 36-38.

⁹⁸ Mona West, “Irony in the Book of Jonah: Audience Identification with the Hero,” *PRS* (1984): 238-39, citing Terence E. Fretheim, *The Message of Jonah* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1977), 30.

⁹⁹ Sasson, *Jonah*, 71, thinks that this writing of Nineveh’s name is based on Assyrian folk etymology, though its origin and meaning are uncertain.

water is demonstrated by the parallel phrases: (v. 4a) **וַיִּנְהַר יַסְבֵּבְנִי**, (v. 6a) **יַסְבֵּבְנִי תְהוֹמוֹ**. Although mythical figures such as Leviathan (or Lotan), Yamm, and Tiamat are demythologized as “fish” (**דָּגָה**), “sea” (**מַיִם**), and “depth” (**תְּהוֹמוֹ**) respectively,¹⁰⁰ the psalmist is still dependent on the mythical description of the engulfing power of the traditional pairing of “Death and Sea.”¹⁰¹ This mythical experience of Jonah is strengthened by the following image drawn on his approach to death by arriving at the entrance to the underworld. According to McCarter, the cosmic waters (sea and river) expressed in Jonah, in Canaanite cosmology, have their confluence at the mountain of El and the same time are to be located at the entrance to the watery abode of Mot.¹⁰² This cosmological background of the underworld is made explicitly in v. 7a:

At the roots of the mountain, I descended to the land (**אֶרֶץ**) whose bars closed upon me forever.

The term **אֶרֶץ** is here implied as “earth below” (**תְּהוֹמוֹת אֶרֶץ**, **אֶרֶץ תְּהוֹמֹת**) or “depths of the earth,” (**תְּהוֹמוֹת הָאָרֶץ**, **תְּהוֹמֹת אֶרֶץ**) because the term **אֶרֶץ** alone can mean “the

¹⁰⁰ Herbert G. May, “Some Cosmic Connotations of Mayim Rabbim, ‘Many Waters’” *JBL* 74 (1955): 14, notes that the waters of **תְּהוֹמוֹ** through which one passes to the netherworld are the same waters which are pictured in conflict with the deity in the ancient myth.

¹⁰¹ Frank M. Cross, “Studies in the Structure of Hebrew Verse: The Prosody of the Psalm of Jonah,” in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall*, ed. Herbert B. Huffmon et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 163.

¹⁰² Peter K. McCarter, “The River Ordeal in Israelite Literature,” *HTR* 66/4 (1973): 405.

underworld” (Isa. 26:19; Ps. 22:30; Job 17:16),¹⁰³ and evidence of this is attested by many ancient Near Eastern literatures.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, Jonah praises his deliverance from the Pit (שְׁחַת) by YHWH. This term שְׁחַת also refers to the watery nature of the underworld.¹⁰⁵ The paralleled psalms with Jonah’s song demonstrate the same death experience in the underworld: Psalm 18 (2 Sam 22), and 69.

The extreme downward vertical movement (יָרַד) culminates in the experience of “the bar of the underworld” (2:7a). But verse 7b reverses its vertical downward movement upward by referring to YHWH’s delivering life from the Pit.¹⁰⁶ This upward movement is strengthened by the parallel phrases in vv. 5 and 8: אֶל־הַיִּכָּל קָדְשְׁךָ (“to your holy Temple”).¹⁰⁷ Wendland emphasizes the importance of the midpoint of the entire book of Jonah in 2:8 in terms of its “concentric structural development.”¹⁰⁸ The psalmist’s wish and prayer toward the

¹⁰³ Magnus Ottosson, “אֶרֶץ,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 388-405.

¹⁰⁴ Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Netherworld in the Old Testament*, 23-46.

¹⁰⁵ Marvin H. Pope, “The Word שְׁחַת in Job 9:31,” *JBL* 83 (1964): 269-78, argues that Mot, god of the underworld, and his place are related with “a putrescent watery mixture” and whose city is covered with the mountain as its lid and is called “slushy” in the Ugarit text.

¹⁰⁶ Jerome T. Walsh, “Jonah 2:3-10: A Rhetorical Critical Study,” *Biblica* 63/2 (1982): 226.

¹⁰⁷ Jonathan Magonet, *Form and Meaning: Studies in Literary Techniques in the Book of Jonah* (Bern: Herbert Lang, 1976), 40, maintains that the literary technique of “the growing phrase” is used in verses 4 and 6 (יִסְבֶּנִי) and verses 5 and 9 (אֶל־הַיִּכָּל קָדְשְׁךָ) for the direction of movement.

¹⁰⁸ Wendland, “Text Analysis and the Genre of Jonah,” part 2, 378.

holy Temple in the experience of Sheol seems to reflect the cultic setting for the historical audience, which means the shift from myth to history. The Temple appears to be the center in which YHWH is enthroned after defeating the chaotic evil forces, like Baal and Marduk. His people can account for their deliverance from distress and failure. The Temple is seen as the micro-cosmos of God's salvation for Israel and the creation of the world.¹⁰⁹

The Temple as the *Axis Mundi* in Creation Theology. Levenson argues that *mythopoesis* ("making of myth") is a means by which human beings discern and convey truths otherwise inexpressible.¹¹⁰ He maintains that the familiar interpretation of the religion of Israel as radically demythologized obscures great spiritual treasures. The vitality of myth, as he argues, is seen in the description of the Temple when its building on Mount Zion is transformed into its foundation in primal times (*in illo tempore*), absorbing the legacy of Mount Sinai into the cultic experience of the Temple on Mount Zion.¹¹¹

He [YHWH] built his sanctuary like the heights, like the earth which he founded for all eternity. He chose David his servant and took him from the sheepfolds. (Ps. 78:69-70)

¹⁰⁹ For the role of the Temple, see Jon D. Levenson, "The Temple and the World," *JR* 64 (1984): 275-98; *idem*, "The Jerusalem Temple in Devotional and Visionary Experience," in *Jewish Spirituality*, vol. 1, *From the Bible through the Middle Ages*, ed. Arthur Green, (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1986), 32-61.

¹¹⁰ Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, Seabury, 1985), 89-91, 105. *Contra* Gerhard von Rad and George E. Wright.

¹¹¹ Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 106. He uses this term from Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954), 20, referring to "the primal event" as a mythical time, bearing on the protological character. Cf. Segal, 122.

The mythical configuration of the Temple as a center, or a navel of the world (Ezek. 5:5, 38:12), can be compared to the image of Mt. Zaphon as the cosmic mountain in the Ugaritic text.¹¹² The temple *mythos* as the cosmic center seems to be reflected in the decoration of the molten sea image in Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 7:23), which means that the Temple is the micro-cosmos where God governs the creation order over the chaotic nature of the sea.

Jonah's experience of Sheol in the belly of Leviathan appears to reorient the cultic experience of Israel from the cosmic mountain below,¹¹³ that is, the underworld (2:7a, "at the roots of the mountains) to the Temple above, which is the opposite cosmic mountain of Zion. The author of Jonah considers the Temple as the only hope in the time of distress and death.¹¹⁴ According to Eliade, "the temple or sacred city as the place through which the *Axis Mundi* (the center of the world) passes is held to be a point between heaven, earth, and hell."¹¹⁵ The yearning for the Temple from the crisis of death or enemy's

¹¹² Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 4, argues that the cosmic mountain has such characteristics as the meeting place of the gods, the battleground of conflicting natural forces, the meeting place of heaven and earth, and the place where effective decrees are issued for the government and stability of the Cosmos.

¹¹³ Inanna's descent into the underworld relates that Mountain *Lapis Lazuli* is located at the gate of the underworld; see Kramer, "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World," 2.

¹¹⁴ Jonah's three-day descent (distress and death) and his yearning for the Temple could be compared with the motivation of Israel's Exodus story, when God commanded them to "go three days' journey to the wilderness and sacrifice to YHWH" (Exod. 3:18, 5:3, 8:27).

¹¹⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Meridan, 1958), 375.

oppression is a prominent theme in the Psalms (Ps. 23, 26, 27, 36, 42, 43, 84).¹¹⁶ It is found that the motif of the ascent to the temple is significantly connected with the healing story of King Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:5, 8; Isa. 38:22).¹¹⁷ The message that underlies Jonah's psalm is that the community crisis from Israel's chaotic experience should be redirected toward the Temple which is the *Axis Mundi* for God's people, whether the enemy nations (Assyria or Babylon) around them matter in their life and death situation.

Jonah's descent into Sheol is abruptly compared with idolators (2:9). His ascent toward the Temple (the theophanic and cosmic mountain) seems to represent the priestly concern about the narrative about the sanctuary. In this aspect, Jonah's descent and ascent could be compared with Moses' ascent and descent in the Sinai-pericope (Exod. 19-34). Knierim's study shows that the priestly conceptual reworking of the old Yahwistic-deuteronomic ascent-descent tradition in Exod. 19:3-39:43 demonstrates the makings of the covenant and the sanctuary, though the latter represents "the organization of Israel as a strictly theocratic community around this sanctuary," while the former became subordinate to the sanctuary.¹¹⁸ Compared with Moses' extended ascent to the highest level of the God in the cloud, according to hierarchical order of Israel's representatives

¹¹⁶ Martin R. Hauge, *Between Sheol and Temple: Motif Structure and Function in the I-Psalms* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 38-162.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 70. Hauge argues that the promise of 15 years of life and victory over the foes is ignored by Hezekiah who concentrates on the healing and the ascension.

¹¹⁸ Rolf P. Knierim, "The Composition of the Pentateuch," in *SBL 1985 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 393-415, argues that the Sinai-pericope comprises Moses' six ascent-descent cycles (Exod. 19:3-8a; 19:8b-19; 19:20-20:20; 20:21-24:8; 24:9-34:3; 34:4-39:43).

between YHWH and Israel in Exod. 24:9-18,¹¹⁹ Jonah's descent is extended to the netherworld. It is worthwhile to note that both the Sinai-pericope and Jonah's story reflect the historical crisis of the destruction of the sanctuary or the Temple. Thus the crisis of the cultic setting could make the author or redactor appeal to the permanent sanctuary (the cosmic Temple) as YHWH's presence.¹²⁰

When Moses descends from the mountain, he witnesses Israelite idolatry (Exod. 32). After God's judgment, Moses ascends again to the mountain for the new Tablets and his intercession. In the mountain, YHWH proclaims his nature of mercy and judgment:

The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, "The LORD." The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." (Exod. 34:5-7)

Israel's cultic experience originated in YHWH's descent upon Mt. Sinai in fire (Exod. 19:18-20),¹²¹ while Moses' responsive ascent and descent came to set up the sanctuary and instruct the Torah for Israel. The divine descent on the

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 401-2. Knierim notes that, in Moses' ascent, there are two periods of separation between Moses and other (seven days and forty days) and there are five stages of hierarchical reality of localities: (1) camp, (2) higher level with Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders; and Aaron and Hur, (3) a further high level with Joshua, (4) another higher level with Moses alone, outside the cloud, (5) and the highest level with Moses, certainly alone with God in the cloud.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 403. Knierim points out that the real crisis consists of the destruction of the tablets in Exod. 32.

¹²¹ For God's descent in the Old Testament, see Gen. 11:5, 7; Exod. 3:8, 19:11, 18, 20; Neh. 9:13; 2 Sam. 22:10; Ps. 144:5; Isa. 31:4, 64:1, 3; Mic. 1:3.

theophanic mountain made possible the existence of Israel as “a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:6). The human (Jonah or Israel) descent into the underworld in the mythic past, however, might express human failure in the response to God’s descent for Israel, though a possible ascent toward the theophanic Temple remains open.

Inter-textuality between Moses and Jonah in the motif of descent and ascent mounts to the proclamation of the divine nature of God the Creator in Mt. Sinai and the Temple of Mt. Zion. While the former is the self-proclamation of YHWH, the latter proclaims his revised statement of the divine nature whose justice regarding iniquity is eliminated (4:2) from Jonah’s descent experience.¹²²

Remythologization of the *Descensus* Tradition

In the Hebrew Bible, the general process of historicization and demythologization in transforming realities (from myth to history) has been accepted among Old Testament scholars, even though some background of myths exists in the narratives and poetry in a fragmentary form or in allusions.¹²³ For example, the Israelite faith in their God of history makes Rahab into a historical reality, Egypt. And the combat myth between Rahab and the deity is transformed into being put at the service of the history of the Exodus.¹²⁴ Even the dragon imagery is employed to denote the exile in Babylon carried out by

¹²² Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets*, 1:329.

¹²³ Ps. 74:12-17; 89:10-13; Isa. 51:9-10; Job 26:10-12; 38:1-11; Ps. 104:26.

¹²⁴ Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 197-98.

Nebuchadrezzar, who has swallowed Israel like “a sea serpent” (Jer. 51:34, 44).¹²⁵ It, however, appears that the wisdom influence on the search for a new meaning of the historical reality of Israel in crisis redirects the movement from demythologization to re-mythologization (from history to myth), that is, *mythopoesis*. This “theological wisdom” affirms God as the ultimate meaning of historical existence and reality within the issue of theodicy.

Jonah’s descent is not a kind of myth as a fictional mode in which the hero or demi-god descends into Hades to claim his victorious power over death. Nor does it employ the combat myth to enthrone the overpowering divine hero and explain some cosmogony. Rather, the attempt of the author for *mythopoesis* is to reclaim that God the Creator is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient even in God’s hiddenness before human eyes. At the same time, Jonah’s descent into the underworld would symbolize human fragility and mortality, leading to the failure in understanding God’s nature of mercy and judgment. Furthermore it threatens Israel’s existence with non-existence. Conversely, even when YHWH appears to be silent in the matter of the national crisis of Israel, His divine nature of mercy and judgment operates even in the land of the enemy. How much more for God’s people!¹²⁶

When history seems to fail His people, there remains the greater hope in God the Creator who is enthroned in the Temple that signifies the creation and its order in God. The chaotic feature of the underworld could not prevent God’s

¹²⁵ John Day, “Problems in the Interpretation of the Book of Jonah,” 37; Landes, “Kerygma of the Book of Jonah,” 13.

¹²⁶ The last phrase (4:11) of the book of Jonah, וַיִּבְרַח יוֹנָה רַבָּהּ seem to imply God’s care for his people rhetorically.

enthronement because YHWH is only the God of the universe. When historical time and space come to collapse before human eyes, the greater cosmic time and place, which are symbolized in the Temple on Mt. Zion and regularized in the liturgical activity, appear in the cultic experience of the Temple (myth is embedded in liturgy). Through de-historicizing and re-mythologizing historical existence, creation theology, centering on the Creator, plays an important role in this theological wisdom to understand the realities of the creation order.¹²⁷ The author of Jonah might raise a question: Can one play the divine role of “dove” (Jonah) after the Flood of Noah (divine judgment) for God’s re-creation (divine mercy)?

Sign of Jonah (Mt 12:40; Q 11:29:32)

In the New Testament, Matthew and Luke know very well about the story of Jonah which is described in the book of Jonah. Both of them refer to the “sign of Jonah”¹²⁸ in the context of Jesus’ denial of the demand for a sign by the Jewish sign-seekers. The phrase, “sign of Jonah” is nowhere attested in the book of Jonah, nor anywhere else in early Jewish literature. The meaning of the sign of Jonah for Matthew and Luke has been argued among various scholars.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ For the importance of creation theology in Old Testament theology, see Knierim, *Task of Old Testament Theology*, 171-208.

¹²⁸ This phrase only appears in Mt 12:39, 16:4 and Lk 11: 29.

¹²⁹ George M. Landes, “Jonah in Luke: the Hebrew Bible Background to the Interpretation of the ‘Sign of Jonah’ Pericope in Luke 11.29-32,” in *A Gift of God in Due Season: Essays on Scripture and Community in Honor of James A. Sanders*, ed. Richard Weis and David Carr (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 133-63.

Some would say that the sign demonstrates Jonah's rescue from the death experience, which signifies Jesus' triumph over death. This interpretation of the "sign of Jonah" led early Christian art to express it as the sign of resurrection or eternal life of blessing.¹³⁰ The other main category of its interpretation is that Jonah himself or Jonah's preaching of judgment is a sign to the Ninevites. Interestingly, Matthew and Luke use Jonah's story differently in explicating the "sign of Jonah," despite the fact that the literary context is set in terms of Jesus' denial of the demanded "sign from heaven":

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth. The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here! The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here!" (Mt 12:38-42)

When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, "This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation. The queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here! The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here!" (Lk 11:29-32)

Mark 8:12 simply indicates that Jesus rejects the "sign from heaven" (Mt 16:1;

¹³⁰ This interpretation sees the phrase as a "genitive objective" in that the rescue of Jonah from death is made by the action of God and Jonah is the object of God's saving action.

Lk 11:16) which the generation requests, by saying that “truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation,” without any reference to “except the sign of Jonah” and the further story of Jonah. Thus both texts of Matthew and Luke are considered as dependent on the sayings-source of Q material. Although there is an uncertainty of which one is more original to the Q saying, Edwards claims that careful study of Matthew and Luke reveals that Q’s version of the Jonah saying is its combination of Jesus’ refusal to give a sign, with the exception of the sign of Jonah, and the double saying about the witness of the Ninevites and of the queen of the south.¹³¹

When the combination of the “sign of Jonah” and the double saying of witness is made, the Matthean order of the “people of Nineveh” saying and the “queen of the south” saying are reversed in Luke.¹³² If Luke’s reordering of the Q saying of Jonah is his theological thrust that the sign of Jonah is identified with Jonah’s proclamation of God’s judgment, the saying of Matthew is closer to the order of the Q saying, in that Matthew’s ordering appears to be more natural because it brings into juxtaposition all the story of Jonah as a sequence in Mt 12:40-41.¹³³ In any case, the Q community created the phrase, “sign of Jonah,” even though Matthew and Luke reworked it differently in explicating its meaning.

¹³¹ Richard A. Edwards, *The Sign of Jonah: In the Theology of the Evangelists and Q* (Naperville, IL: A. R. Allenson, 1971), 80-89, also presupposes that the pre-Markan tradition shares the saying refusing a sign with the Q tradition and that the Q unit as a whole has its sequence of request, refusal, exception, and explanation.

¹³² Anton Vögtle, “Der Spruch von Jonaszeichen,” in *Synoptische Studien: Festschrift für Alfred Wikenhauser*, ed. Anton Vögtle (Munich: Karl Zink Verlag, 1953), 235, argues that Luke separates two sayings from its connection.

¹³³ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke X-XXIV* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 932, concludes that one cannot say for certain who inverted the order of Q.

What is the meaning of the “sign of Jonah” when the Q saying makes an exception to the Markan Jesus’ absolute refusal of a sign? This new understanding of a sign, so-called, “sign of Jonah” which might be differentiated from the signs and wonders requested by Jews, significantly involves the descent story of the hero. This descent story is used and emphasized in the Matthean version of the Q saying:

For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth. (Mt 12:40)

Landes denies that the explication of “except the sign of the prophet Jonah” (12:39) in the following verse means any indication of defeat and humiliation because Matthew presents Jesus as the Jewish Messiah as triumphing over death (death but yet deliverance).¹³⁴ The “eschatological correlative” between Jonah and Jesus is bound as the *protasis* clause beginning with ὥσπερ (with the past tense) is subordinated to the *apodosis* of οὕτως with the future tense.¹³⁵

The phrase “in the heart of the earth” (ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ τῆς γῆς) does not appear in the Hebrew Bible and pre-Christian Jewish literature, but only here once in the New Testament. From the LXX version of Jonah 2, the phrase seems to

¹³⁴ George M. Landes, “Matthew 12:40 as an Interpretation of “The Sign of Jonah” Against its Biblical Background, in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and M. O’Connor (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 667.

¹³⁵ Landes’ thesis is that the Lukan reordering is to emphasize that the sign of Jonah is Jonah’s preaching as the “eschatological correlative” (Edwards’ term referring to a collapsing of past, present and future into one moment, created by the Q community), bringing together Jonah’s proclamation to the Ninevites and Jesus’ proclamation of judgment-repentance to the evil generation, in a way of literary highlight in the Lukan reading of the Deuteronomic material (Deut. 11).

be created by the author of Mt 12:40:¹³⁶

into the depths of the *heart* of the sea (v. 4, εἰς βάθη καρδίας θαλάσσης)
I descended to the *earth*. (v. 7, κατέβην εἰς γῆν)

It is certain that Matthew makes an eschatological correlative between Jonah's experience in the belly of the sea monster and Jesus' death whose world is expressed as "in the heart of the earth." Though the image of water or sea as chaotic nature is used for the underworld in the Hebrew Bible,¹³⁷ the Hellenistic influence comes to see the underworld located under the earth. The limited sojourn (three days and nights) in the netherworld only signifies the death experience, but deliverance from death is not yet in view.

Landes argues that if the sign of Jonah means death and resurrection, the whole context against which the demand-for-a-sign motif is set does not make a sign of the future death and resurrection of Jesus an appropriate response to the scribes and Pharisees' request.¹³⁸ Jesus' categorical refusal to give a heavenly sign to the Jewish opponents is replaced by his eschatological sign of the Son of Man. The resurrection of the future could belong to the categorical "sign from heaven" for the Pharisees who believe in the future resurrection. Thus, the "sign of Jonah" only points to the realm of death, that is, the netherworld to which every human being should descend, both in the ancient Near Eastern and Greek

¹³⁶ Landes, "Matthew 12:40," 667.

¹³⁷ The normal expression of the OT, "the heart of the sea" (בְּלֶב יָם) is expressed in Exod. 15:8, Ezek. 27:4, 28:2, Ps. 46:3, Prov. 23:34, Jonah 2:4, and etc. The chaotic and otherworldly nature of the subterranean waters in the Hebrew Bible is usually described as "depth" (תְּהוֹם).

¹³⁸ Landes, "Matthew 12:40," 668.

culture.

Matthew's reading of Jonah 2 concerns "three days and three nights in the belly of the fish", which demonstrates the near death experience in Sheol. Jonah's plea for deliverance in crisis and YHWH's conquering power of death culminate in the salvation oracle, "salvation belongs to YHWH" (2:10). Even before Matthew, Jesus in Hades prior his own resurrection seems to have been formulated as a Christological issue at the end of the first century C.E. Mostly in the New Testament tradition, especially the Gospels, the writers tend to be "reticent" when it comes to saying anything about the activity of Jesus in Hades.¹³⁹ In the line of interpretation that provides for Matthew the eschatological correlative between Jonah and Jesus, however, there are several references to Jesus in Hades before resurrection (Acts 2:31; Rom. 10:7; Lk 23:43; Eph. 4:7-10; Rev. 1:18; 1 Pet. 3:18-22, 4:5-6). Landes, more interestingly, finds this line of interpretation in the pre-Matthean tradition that he uses in his visualizing of some connection between Jesus' brief presence in Hades after death and the "awakening" of the bodies of many holy saints (Mt 27:51-54).¹⁴⁰ The vivification in the netherworld by the event of Jesus' death even before his resurrection might be implicit in John's eschatological event of the manifestation of the Son:

¹³⁹ Joachim Jeremias, "Zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern: Descensus und Ascensus in der Karfreitagstheologie des Neues Testamentes," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 42 (1949): 199.

¹⁴⁰ Landes, "Matthew 12:4," 670-71, argues that this cataclysmic feature (vivification in the netherworld) after Jesus' death is related to Jesus' proclamation of the divine salvation and God's raising Jesus and the saints, but does not think that Jesus is not the agent who awoke the dead righteous.

“Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out -- those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” (John 5:25-29)¹⁴¹

It would be true that any hint of the descent tradition of Jesus was suppressed in the Gospels, but its tradition that appeared explicitly in the second-century literature did not come into being abruptly.¹⁴² Rather the *descensus* tradition was likely to be used by the Q community and other NT writers in one way or another. The apocalyptic tradition and Merkavah mysticism in Judaism had already developed their descent tradition of the righteous heroes before Christianity. Later the concept of the “sign of Jonah” would eventually come to reshape the tradition so that Christ’s descent into Hades would signal victory over death, but not humiliation and suffering.

The “sign from heaven” is rejected by Jesus. The sign from Hades (“the Son of Man in the heart of the earth”), however, will accomplish the judgment of the evil generation, as in John 5:27-28. The Jewish descent in the book of Jonah seems to imply the old descent myths in which the feature of the underworld is similar to the Mesopotamian netherworld. The myth is used for the Israelites’ new experience of encountering the God of the whole universe including the underworld. This might influence the appearance of Christ’s descent into Hades.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 672, argues that John might take over and reshape the descent tradition of Jesus as life-giver as well as dispenser of judgment in these verses.

¹⁴² The details of the early church fathers’ references to Christ’s descent will be discussed in chapter 7.

Matthew knew this tradition and reshaped it in using the Q material so that the Son of Man proved to be eschatologically a Jonah by way of his sojourn in the netherworld. Jonah's descent to the underworld (near-death experience) provides an eschatological correlative for the event of Jesus' death.

Matthew and John imply that some vivification in Hades has happened because of his death, though they are reticent about the victorious descent of Jesus to Hades. Later in the early church, the "sign of Jonah" would eventually come to mean Christ's victory over death, by his willful descent. Another background behind Christ's descent to Hades is related with a new picture of the underworld with the afterlife judgment, which is clearly Greek. The Lukan *nekyia* (descent into Hades) is another biblical use of the *descensus* tradition.

CHAPTER 3

The Greek Descent: Luke 16

The *descensus* motif appears to have been used in a Greek way. The most famous story of the Greek descent is the Homeric *nekyia* (Homer's *Odyssey*, Book 11) which was modeled in Vergil's *Aeneid*. Luke seems to know this Greek *nekyia* (the descent into Hades) in that he describes the Greek descent scene in a different way in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Without any reference to the visionary experience or the motif of the journey to the netherworld, he simply describes two contrasting figures in the life of this world and the reversed life after death. What I would argue from this parable is that some of the New Testament writers already use the descent story for their theological purpose, even though the origin of the literary source has been argued among scholars. Luke's theological adaptation of the descent story for his literary and theological purpose would indicate a hint of the existence of the *descensus* tradition before the New Testament writers.

When the idea of Christ's descent into Hades is used for literary and theological purposes by various authors of the New Testament, the conceptualization of the idea for their immediate Christian community would follow the process of Christianization and appropriation of the old myth and motif of descent. In a similar way, Luke makes his *nekyia* for the theological justification of his Gentile community under the strong influence of the Greek *nekyia*. This consideration of Luke's *nekyia* will show how the *descensus*

tradition can be conceptualized and contextualized by the Evangelist. Before the Lukan description of the descent into Hades, it should be noted what theological points the general Greek *nekyai* make in the development of the descent story.

Greek *Nekyia*: Breach of the Boundary between the Living and the Dead

Homeric *Nekyia*

In contrast to the rigid Mesopotamian boundary between life and death, the Greek flexibility of the boundary around the time of the New Testament has a history of its development.¹ When Homer described death and Hades in his *Nekyia* (*Odyssey* 11 and 24) and *Iliad* 23, the dead in Hades exist as a shadow (σκιή), dream (ὄνειρος) or image (εἶδωλον) so that Achilles could not embrace his dead Patroklos (*Iliad* 23.103-4) and Odysseus could not grasp his dead mother in Hades (*Od.* 11.204-8). The departed soul in Hades is not substantial, even though the soul still retains its identity and memory of its previous life. The Homeric account of “postmortem impalpability”² in Hades is not so favorably described as the later idea of the Greek immortality. Achilles describes the life in Hades as “the unheeding dead” and “the phantoms of men outworn” (*Od.* 11.475-76). He longs for the life of a living person rather than living as a king over the dead:

“O shining Odysseus, never try to console me for dying. I would rather follow the plow as thrall to another man, one with no land allotted him and not much to live on, than be a king over all the perished dead.” (11.488-91)³

¹ Diodorus of Sicily (c. 60-c. 30 B.C.E.) catalogs the living heroes who invaded the land of the dead in his works.

² See Gregory J. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 50-58.

³ Translation from Richmond Lattimore, *The Odyssey of Homer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 180.

For Homer, the land of the dead should be separated from human habitation because the spirit of the dead might influence the living.⁴ “Hades”⁵ is located far to the West beyond the limit of the Ocean, not beneath the earth.⁶ It appears that Homer wants to keep it distant from the realm of the living because he believes that this life is more important than the insubstantial afterlife. When Homer has Odysseus choose his heroic fame rather than Calypso’s offered immortality in her island (*Od.* 5),⁷ he implies that the human attempt to attain immortality is risky and belongs to the realm of the gods. At least, the human break into the *pax deorum* (peace of gods)⁸ for any reason is forbidden because it ruins the separation between mortals and immortals. In this aspect, Homer’s lesson is similar to that of the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh epic.

⁴ The spirit of Elpenor in Hades, whose body was not buried yet, asks Odysseus for his proper burial lest “I might become the gods’ curse upon you” (*Od.* 11.73). Walter Burkett calls this as “the radical separation of the dead from the living.” See his book, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 197.

⁵ Hades as lord of the underworld and brother of Zeus became later referred to as the land of the dead, when the souls descend “into Hades,” which means “into the house of Hades” (εἰς Ἀΐδαο δόμους). Cf. “house of Hades (*Od.* 10.491; *Iliad* 23.19); the “wide-gate house of Hades” (*Iliad* 23.74). The bronze gates of the wall of Hades were fashioned by Poseidon (*Theogony* 732).

⁶ In Hesiod’s *Theogony* 722-25, he adds the special prison of Tartaros in the house of Hades, located beneath the earth, for the imprisonment of the Titans (the brothers of Kronos), as far as a brazen anvil falls from earth for ten days, while he sees *Elysium* (the Isle of the Blessed) as located at the western end of the world (*Works and Days*), like the island of Calypso where Odysseus had lived with this goddess; Homer’s *Iliad* 8.13-16 describes the *Tartaros* as the “deepest gulf beneath the earth” and the place where there are gates of iron and the threshold of bronze. In *Odyssey* Books 10-11, Homer indicates that the house of Hades is situated in the western world beyond the Ocean as the place for the human dead and there is an unnamed place for punishment for superhuman rebels.

⁷ Segal, *Life after Death*, 211.

⁸ Riley, *One Jesus, Many Christs*, 167, 197, argues that, based on the monistic worldview, “everything and everyone has a proper place and function,” and thereby humans and gods live under a “spiritual contract of symbiosis” between them. This concept is helpful in understanding the necessity of the boundary between the living and the dead or between this world and the netherworld.

“Death and Hades,”⁹ however, have developed in their ideas and features since Homer. The Greeks invented the afterlife judgment and developed the compartmentalization of Hades. Ζεὺς Μειλίχιος¹⁰ (Hades, Dis, or Pluto) shares his status of judge with three sons of Zeus (Minos, Rhadamanthos, Aeacus). Homer describes Hades as slightly compartmentalized with Hades, Elysium, and Tartaros within it. While Elysium belongs to such a hero as Menelaos, Tartaros is the prison house for such super-human level sinners as Orion, Tantalos, Typhoeus, Sisyphos, and Tityus. Hades was the place of neutral death for all human beings without judgment of their deeds. When the afterlife feature of the departed soul, however, becomes more substantial, the fate of every soul becomes more morally judged in Hades where moral judgment of their human life determines to which compartment of Hades they will go.

Plato and His Doctrine of the Soul

In the history of the ideas of the Greek afterlife and the doctrine of the soul, Plato takes the most important step toward New Testament anthropology and cosmology. Before Plato, when the cult of souls had been popular since the Archaic age, the concept of later speculation of the immortal soul began to develop as the cultic worship of Dionysus was introduced from Central Asia

⁹ This *hendiadys* (“one through two”) is already expressed in Hesiod’s *Works and Days* 152-55 where a brazen race was destroyed by black Death and passed to the house of chill Hades. Cf. Rev. 6:8; 20:13

¹⁰ This epithet is a euphemism for a chthonic deity, Hades, which means a “mild, gracious” Hades who is “the protector of those who invoked him with propitiatory offerings.” This appellation is found in some Greek inscriptions. See *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, 9th ed., vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), 1093.

(Thrace or Phrygia) by some Greeks who fashioned the cult into a distinct Orphism in the sixth century B.C.E.¹¹ Plato adopts the Orphic-Neopythagorean concept that the divine nature of the human soul is a free and responsible cause of one's fate.¹² His body-soul dualism provides the foundation for the idea of the journey of the soul from its divine home to the material world and back again.¹³

On the other hand, after an anthropological dualism, which highlighted the intrinsic difference between body and soul, was introduced and adopted under the influence of Orphism and Pythagoreanism, the divine element of the *psyche* came to be directed toward the development of ethics in edifying virtues of the divine soul.¹⁴ This is because it is stressed that the soul retains its individuality throughout its series of reincarnation (*metempsychosis*)¹⁵ before it finally escapes from the "cycle of becoming" or "births and deaths" to return to its divine home, rather than being simply reabsorbed into the cosmic *arche*. This aspect of the soul's individuality and immortality came to emphasize certain moral or ethical principles that must be followed in order to be released from embodiment and to

¹¹ David M. Reis, *The Journey of the Soul: Its Expressions in Early Christianity*, Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate University, 1999 (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1999), 31.

¹² Plato knew the teaching of Orphism when he referred to the "Titanic nature" of human beings in his *Law*, 701c.

¹³ Plato recounts that "probably the Orphic poets were the inventors of the derivation... the soul is suffering the punishment of sin and that the body is an enclosure or prison in which the soul is incarcerated, kept safe" (*Cratylus* 400c); cf. *Phaedrus* 250c.

¹⁴ Plato asserts the immortality of the soul in *Phaedo* 105e, *Republic* 10.610a-11a, *Phaedrus* 245c-46a, and *Symposium* 207d, 208a-b.

¹⁵ *Republic* 10.614ff.; *Phaedrus* 246b-50c; *Phaedo* 81e.

achieve salvation.¹⁶

Since the time of the Pre-Socratic philosophers in the Ionian tradition, the newly developed geo-centric cosmology in the classical age¹⁷—the earth was surrounded by concentric circles around which the seven heavens are revolving, with the fixed stars of the heaven in the highest level—has changed in its theology from the traditional three-story universe in the Homeric world of the Archaic Greek. It is claimed that the Homeric gods cannot fill the vastness of the cosmos discovered by the new Greek science. While only the philosophically abstract notion of the God of goodness, as in Plato, can contain all things in Oneself, the intelligible world as divine should be posited beyond the visible world. From this cosmology and new concept of God the *Monad*, the idea of the journey of the soul through the heavenly spheres (the descending of the pre-existent soul into the body and the return of the soul to its origin) makes possible the theological constructions on creation, soteriology, and eschatology. This concept of the journey of the soul, however, is adopted and articulated in different ways among the theological speculations.

In addition to Plato's doctrine of the soul, Plato develops the idea of the compartmentalization of Hades. That is, when a person dies, the mortal and immortal parts are separated. Since the soul survives death, its fate in the next world depends on

¹⁶ Reis, 91. For this goal of the soul, Plato has Socrates stress the *paideia* of the soul in that the soul is the moral agent of purification as well as its object, see *Apology* 30a-b; *Phaedo* 107c.

¹⁷ See Gregory J. Riley, *The River of God: A New History of Christian Origins* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 38-49, argues that this geocentric cosmology has changed the theological perspectives on God and human destiny after death, noting a new philosophical concept of God the *Monad*.

how well one has prepared one's soul for the next world. The souls are appointed and distributed to their proper habitations according to judgment.¹⁸ According to his *Phaedo* 113-14, there are four fates of the souls according to the moral judgment in Hades: purified, indeterminate, curable, and incurably wicked. The *Gorgias* demonstrates that the souls with blemishes, scars, and deformities are sent away to the prison house where they are doomed on their arrival to endure the sufferings proper to them (525a), when the Judges label them as evil, curable, or incurable (526b-c). After being purified in Tartaros, the curable soul returns to a new life, whereas the incurable never does.¹⁹ It is certain that Plato separates the fate of eternal punishment for the incurable from that of temporary punishment for the purification of the curable. When Plato accepts the teaching of Orphic- Pythagoreanism in his afterlife feature, he has Socrates favorably recount the idea of some mystics who direct the religious initiations by which he who is purified and enlightened shall dwell among gods (*Phaedo* 69c-d).

In the *Republic*, Adeimantus, a participant in Plato's dialogue, talking about the doctrine and practice of the Orphics (Musaeus and his son), argues that many do what is just, not from a love of justice but only because the gods are reputed to have promised rewards for justice and threatened punishment for injustice. He traces this pernicious doctrine to the Orphics. He complains that the initiates are crowned with wreaths and feast at a banquet, while they (Orphics) picture the others buried in mud and compelled to carry water in a sieve (363d-e), asserting that the living can purify themselves from sins "by means of sacrifice and pleasant sport" (364e) and maintaining that these same rites

¹⁸ *Phaedo* 105d-8c.

¹⁹ Bernstein, *Formation of Hell*, 57.

can be used to alleviate the conditions of the dead in the next world (365a).²⁰

Significantly, Plato ends the *Republic* with another *nekyia*, as if the tale of the afterlife which was derided by Adeimantus could serve to promote justice for human life.²¹ In the story, a near dead Pamphylian soldier, Er, proves the truth of Socrates' reasoning by a personal experience because he returned alive after twelve days of death and reports on the fortunes of souls in the hereafter (614-21). He was chosen to be the messenger (*angelos*) to humanity to tell us what waits in the otherworld: those punished go into Tartaros, while those rewarded go to heaven.

And it [tale] will save us if we believe it, and we shall safely cross the River of Lethe, and keep our soul unspotted from the world. (621c)

Vergil's *Nekyia*

Vergil (70-19 B.C.E.)²² emulates the Homeric motif of the descent into the underworld, modeling on Odysseus' *nekyia* in *Odyssey*. Just as Odysseus goes to the underworld to consult the blind prophet Tiresias for the ultimate knowledge of his return home (*nostos*),²³ Aeneas goes to the underworld to see his father who prophesies the future Roman glory as a result of his fate to journey to Rome. The motif of the journey

²⁰ It appears that the mystery cult spreads the idea that his initiation of knowledge affects one's fate of the afterlife. See Bernstein, 41-46, who argues that the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* is one of the mysteries occasioning a rise in speculation about the hereafter; lines 482-84: "Happy is he among men upon earth who has seen these *mysteries*; but he who is not initiated in the rites and who has no part in them, does not share the same good things once he is dead, down in the darkness and gloom."

²¹ Bernstein, 52.

²² I use Vergil instead of the common use of the English name, Virgil, because he is uniformly called *Vergilius* in the Latin sources.

²³ In this scene, Odysseus actually does not descend into Hades, but brings the shades of the dead out at the mouth of Hades.

to the underworld is very important for both Homer and Vergil. Homer obviously takes some pains to demarcate the central section of the poem for the journey by having Odysseus recount his adventures to the Phaeacians.²⁴ In the larger scope of the epic, the journey to the underworld is placed as it is in the structure of the narrative just before his return to Ithaca. Tiresias tells Odysseus the fundamental things he needs to know, namely that he will get home, that he will kill the suitors, that he must make his peace with Poseidon by making an inland journey, and that death will come to him in peaceful old age with his people prosperous round about him (*Odyssey* 11.100-37).²⁵ Vergil uses this Homeric motif to make Aeneas confirm that his journey to Latium is something to be accomplished for the future.

Although Vergil explicitly rewrites another *Odyssey* for the purpose of supporting the *Pax Romana* accomplished by Augustus Caesar, his *Nekyia* is a Platonic universe in which he “platonizes” the Homeric underworld in a substantial way. Under the guidance of the Sybil of Cumae, priestess of Apollo, Aeneas encounters the Platonic souls (neutral, incurable, curable, and blessed).²⁶ In this feature of Hades, the souls are judged according to their deeds in the life²⁷ and sent to Tartaros, or Elysium, while the morally neutral remain at the threshold. Hades is seen as under the jurisdiction of Pluto (“Stygian Jove”) and Persephone (“infernal Juno”), while “Minos, Rhadamanthus, and

²⁴ Stephen V. Tracy, *The Story of the Odyssey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 68.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁶ Bernstein, *Formation of Hell*, 73; cf. Plato’s *Phaedo* 113-14.

²⁷ *Aeneid* 6.743: the souls who are being punished cry out, “each of us suffers his own personal daemons.”

Aeacus”²⁸ judge each soul to be appointed and distributed to its appropriate habitations. The picture of Elysium where Aeneas met his father is an “aristocratic place”²⁹ in which the Roman soldiers practice physical exercise and the philosophers have the discourse. The souls requiring further purification as heavenly descendents of the Roman founders are waiting for reincarnation (724-51). Vergil uses and develops the Homeric *nekyia*, based on the Platonic doctrines of the soul and the afterlife.

Lucian’s Satirical *Nekyia*

The works of Lucian of Samosata (c. 120- c. 200 C.E.) indicate that the second-century audience would expect many tales of descent into Hades. In the *Dialogue of the Dead* 28 (428),³⁰ he has the dead Protesilaus³¹ tell Pluto that even living persons penetrate the boundary of Hades, when he asks Pluto for permission to return to his living bride, Laodameia:

“Let me refresh your memory, Pluto. You gave up Eurydice to Orpheus for this very reason (his love for the wife), and sent back my kinswoman, Alcestis, as a favor to Heracles.”

In another work, *Menippos or Nekromanteia*, Lucian describes the journey of Hades of Menippus, a Cynic philosopher who wants to find out the right way to live through consulting. In describing this journey of Hades to his friend who claims that he has been initiated into the mysteries (πρὸς μεμνημένον), Menippus tells how he could enter

²⁸ They are the divine judges as Zeus’ sons; cf. Plato’s *Gorgias* 523e-24a.

²⁹ Segal, *Life after Death*, 244.

³⁰ In this work, Lucian rewrites Homer’s *Odyssey*, bk. 11 (*Nekyia*) for some dialogues.

³¹ He introduced himself to Pluto by saying that he served with the Achaean army and was the first man who was slain by Hector at Troy. See, lines 426-27.

Hades by using the disguises of Odysseus, Orpheus, and Heracles – cap, lion’s skin, and lyre³² – under the guidance of the Zoroastrian Magus who could open the gates of Hades with certain charms and ceremonies (line 6). Bernstein points to these works of Lucian as indicating the depth of familiarity which a second-century audience could be expected to have with the many tales of descent into the world and the “porosity” in the boundary between life and death.³³

These Greek and Latin works, involving the motif of the *nekyia*, provide a scene of the Greek afterlife for the Lukan parable of Lazarus and the rich man. As Bernstein notes, the boundary between the living and the dead became “porous” prior to Luke’s time. Many Greek and Latin authors open and break the boundary between the living and the dead, and between this world and the afterlife, for their readers and audience for the purpose of their theological and ethical teachings. In the end of the *Republic*, Plato’s story-telling of Er, who tells his friends about his journey to Hades, would be such a classic example.

³² Lucian, *MENIPPION H MEKPMANTEIA*, line 8, trans. Austin M. Harmon (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 87. The invasion of the living heroes into Hades is also mentioned in the *Aeneid* 6.116-23. See Bernstein, *Formation of Hell*, 88.

³³ Bernstein, 87, also exemplifies this point in Lucian’s other works such as *Philosophies for Sale* and *Charon*, in which the dead great philosophers got permission to return to the earth for the Athenian court and Charon, boatman of the Achron, came to the earth to investigate the earthly pleasures.

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31)

When considering the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31), attention must be drawn to the broader literary context of the parable, the so-called travel narrative (9:51-19:44) or central section of Luke's Gospel.³⁴ Although many names have been given to this section, I prefer to use the traditional reference to it as the "travel account."³⁵ This central section, which comprises one-third of the entire Gospel, tells of topics that are peculiar to Luke. For example, of the eighteen parables found only in Luke's Gospel, seventeen are found in this section.³⁶ It has been widely accepted that Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem starts from 9:51, but there is little agreement as to where the section ends.³⁷

Scholars have noticed that even though Luke mentions *Reisenotizen* (journey notification) or journey references, the account omits geographical and

³⁴ The provocative study of this central section in relation to the ordering of the book of Deuteronomy has been done by Christopher F. Evans, "The Central Section of St. Luke's Gospel," in *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lightfoot*, ed. Dennis E. Nineham (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), 37-53.

³⁵ See Dennis J. Ireland, *Stewardship and the Kingdom of God: An Historical, Exegetical, and Contextual Study of the Parable of the Unjust Steward in Luke 16:1-13* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 117 n, 139. So many names such as the Perean Section, the Samaritan Section, the Great Insertion, the Travel Document, the Travel Narrative, and the Central Section indicate that the section of the Lukan special material has various theological and literary motifs that are peculiar to Luke.

³⁶ A. T. Robertson, *Luke the Historian: In the Light of Research* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1920), 150.

³⁷ For the lists of the scholarly discussion about the ending of the section, see James L. Resseguie, "Interpretation of Luke's Central Section (Luke 9:51-19:44) Since 1856," *StudBT* 5/2 (1975): 2 n, 3.

chronological references,³⁸ which may imply that several different journeys are recounted rather than one single one from Galilee to Jerusalem.³⁹ The journey references (9:51, 53; 13:22, 33; 17:11; 18:31; 19:28, 41), all mention Jerusalem as the final destination of Jesus' journey. Luke develops Jesus' last journey to Jerusalem in terms of his theological purpose with redactional and compositional details from the order of the Markan Gospel (the travel motif from Mk 10:1).⁴⁰ For Luke, Jerusalem is the city of destiny towards which Jesus should make his way as the final goal.⁴¹

In the middle of the journey, Jesus introduces the so-called parable of the rich man and Lazarus. It is likely that the parable plays an important role in the Lukan theological concern because it demonstrates the motif of the underworld to intensify Luke's practical concern for teaching the Christian community. In the last decades of the 1st century C.E., when the Gospel of Luke was written, the Hades scene in the Greco-Roman literature was so popular that Luke's introduction of the scene of Hades seemed to be appealing to his audience for his theological and rhetorical purpose because the audience of the Greco-Roman world might well have known the theme and motif of the Greek *nekya*.

³⁸ Evans, "Central Section," 41, argues that after Luke left the Markan material, he had little real knowledge of topography and chronology.

³⁹ Ireland, 143-47.

⁴⁰ Chester C. McCown claims that the journey motif of the section is simply a literary framework for the inclusion of "a collectanea" which have no definite local or historical situations. See his article, "The Geography of Luke's Central Section," *JBL* 57 (1938): 64.

⁴¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I-IX* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 163-64.

Perspective of Νόστος in the Travel Account (Lk 9:51-19:48)

The central section of Luke's Gospel has been a subject of scholarly discussion since Schleiermacher introduced the names, *Reiseabschnitt* (journey episode) or *Reisebericht* (journey account).⁴² The journey motif of Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem appears to be interpolated into the Markan source from a different source. Jesus' journey to Jerusalem provides a literary framework to meet the needs of the early church for which Luke seems to have collected the didactic materials to provide Christian values or truths for believers in Christianity through the lips of Jesus. The striking lack of precise geographical and chronological references in the central section strongly suggests that Luke does not intend it to be read as a chronological record of a journey or journeys by Jesus.⁴³ McCown maintains that Luke derived the travel motif from Mk 10:1 or from already existing traditions about Jesus' last journey to Jerusalem, and used it as the basis for a collection of materials for which his source had no definite local or historical situations and which he threw together into a very loosely organized mass.⁴⁴

There have been several suggestions among scholars concerning the point of termination of the central section.⁴⁵ Egelkraut denies any arbitrary marking of

⁴² For details of Schleiermacher's argument, see Helmuth L. Egelkraut, *Jesus' Mission to Jerusalem: A Redaction Critical Study of the Travel Narrative in the Gospel of Luke, Lk 9:51-19:48* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1976), ~~6 n. 4~~ 4, n. 6.

⁴³ Ireland, *Stewardship and the Kingdom of God*, 155.

⁴⁴ McCown, "Geography of Luke's Central Section," 52.

⁴⁵ 18:14 (Bultmann, Evans, Lohse, Reicke), 19:27/28 (Blinzler, Conzelmann, Godet, Grundmann, Schmidt, Schneider), and 19:44 (Ellis, Farrell, Geldenhuys, Resseguie). For

the termination of Jesus' journey (19:11, 29, 37, or 41) before the city of destination (Jerusalem) is really reached by Jesus.⁴⁶ But he considers Jesus' arriving at the Jerusalem Temple and its cleansing (19:45-48) as the end of the journey to Jerusalem.⁴⁷ Resseguie notices that just as at the beginning of the Galilean ministry Jesus is rejected by his own people at Nazareth (4:14-31), Jesus' journey creates an *inclusio* in the rejections by the Samaritans (9:53) and the temple authorities (19:45-20:18).⁴⁸ This extended passage of the journey (9:51-19:48) indicates that Jesus' cleansing of the Temple is significantly placed at the end of the journey because "*Die Reise hat als Ziel den Temple.*"⁴⁹

It is conceivable that the Jerusalem Temple plays an important role for the Lukan infant narrative (2:21-39, baby Jesus is presented in the Temple) and the Temptation story (4:1-13).⁵⁰ Further, only Luke describes the boy Jesus in the Jerusalem Temple at the age of twelve. This story (2:41-52) does not draw as much scholarly attention. I think that the Lukan presentation of the boy Jesus functions as a prelude to his last journey to Jerusalem. When Jesus' parents notice that he is missing during the journey (a day's journey, 2:44), Jesus at the Jerusalem Temple answers them by saying, "Did you not know that I must be in

more details, see Ireland, 130 and Egelkraut, 6-11.

⁴⁶ Egelkraut, 9-10.

⁴⁷ His argument agrees with Schleiermacher's.

⁴⁸ Resseguie, 3.

⁴⁹ Helmut Flender, *Heil und Geschichte in der Theologie des Lukas* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1965), 71, argues that the journey to Jerusalem (*die Reise nach Jerusalem*) and the way to the Cross (*der Kreuzesweg*) must be separately discerned because the latter is not the extension of the former.

⁵⁰ Contrasted with Matthew's Gospel, Luke explicitly mentions the Jerusalem Temple as a place of the temptation (4:9).

my Father's house?" (2:49).⁵¹ This indicates that Jesus will return to the Temple as part of a divine plan. Thus Jesus' cleansing of the Jerusalem Temple is seen as the realization of the last journey to Jerusalem because Luke foretold the importance of "Jesus' being at the Temple," through the mouth of the boy Jesus. When Jesus drives out the money changers at the Temple, he emphasizes the fact that the Temple is the house of prayer (his Father's house). Implicitly, he presents himself as being at his Father's house at last. The Lukan theology centers on the Temple activities of Jesus, Stephen, and Paul, which came to offend the Jews.⁵²

I see the Lukan travel account (9:51-19:48) from another literary framework of the Greco-Roman world. Homer's main theme in the *Odyssey* is the νόστος (return, or homecoming) of the hero Odysseus. Odysseus' return to his father's country culminates in the cleansing of his house to get rid of the suitors and a visiting of his father's orchard (*Od.* 24). I assume that the motif of νόστος also plays an important part in Jesus' last journey to Jerusalem, which can be seen as a return to the Jerusalem Temple (his Father's house), just as in the *Odyssey*. In the middle of the journey to the Temple, Jesus laments over Jerusalem because of its forsakenness:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

⁵¹ An old *crux interpretum*, ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς μου δεῖ εἶναί με, has various possible meanings. Jesus' enigmatic response implies that Jesus concerns himself with God's domain (place, house). See François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50*, trans. Christine M. Thomas (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 114.

⁵² For more details, see Jack T. Sanders, *The Jews in Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 33-34.

See, your house is left to you. (Lk 13:34-35a)

Like Odysseus, Jesus also laments over the devastation of his Father's house. What is significantly supporting this motif of Jesus' νόστος is that Luke ends Jesus' teachings during the journey with the parable of the ten pounds (Lk 19:11-27). As MacDonald notes, the allegorical pattern of Jesus as the returning householder resembles the tale of Odysseus, who finally returns to his house from many sufferings and cleanses his house of the greedy and gluttonous suitors by killing them.⁵³

If the Lukan travel account is considered as a Homeric νόστος, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus can be also interpreted in light of the heroic journey. Together with the Homeric νόστος, the story of the Trojan hero Aeneas in Vergil's *Aeneid* is also helpful for understanding the parable. Those heroic stories include the heroic "descent into Hades" (*nekylia*) in the middle of the journey. Before Jesus' arriving at the Jerusalem Temple (his Father's house), Luke introduces the scene of Hades to the audience for the purpose of his theological agenda.

Luke's Vision in the Greco-Roman World

Both Homer and Vergil provide Luke with his epic vision of the appearance of the Christian community. Both the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* have a

⁵³ Dennis R. MacDonald, "A Synopsis of Mark, Luke-Acts, and Classical Poetry," see especially, section on "Preparations for the Gospels," photocopy (Claremont: n.p., 2003).

heroic journey as their main literary frameworks. Vergil, author of the latter, purposely wrote his foundational Roman epic by emulating the Homeric epics (the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*) chapter by chapter. Homer and Vergil describe the hero's *nekyia* in the middle of their journeys. Vergil emulates the Homeric motif of the descent (Καταβάσεις) into the underworld in *Aeneid* 6; Odysseus' descent into the underworld is described in *Odyssey* 11.⁵⁴ Homer obviously takes some pains to divide his *Odyssey* in half by achieving the central section of the *nekyia* in Odysseus' recounting his adventures to the Phaeacians.⁵⁵

In the larger scope of the epic, the descent to the underworld is placed as it is in the structure of the narrative just before his return to Ithaca. Both Tiresias in the *Odyssey* and the Sibyl of Cumae in the *Aeneid* function as the intermediaries who foretell the future of the hero who is in the middle of the journey. Aeneas goes to the underworld to see his father Anchises who prophesies the future Roman glory as a result of his fated journey to Rome. To build a new Troy and found a new Roman race, Aeneas suffers and endures every kind of hardship because his "counter-fate (Juno)"⁵⁶ is very tough and severe. Like the intermediaries in the *nekyiai*, Luke tells the future of Christianity which will build a "new Jerusalem" in Rome⁵⁷ and the afterlife of Christian souls in the middle of his story of the fated journey of the Christian hero, Jesus.

⁵⁴ Καταβάσεις into the lower world was a popular theme in the Greek myth (Orpheus, Hercules, Demeter/Persephone, and so on).

⁵⁵ Tracy, *Story of the Odyssey*, 68.

⁵⁶ Brooks Otis, "The Odyssean Aeneid and the Iliadic Aeneid," in *Virgil: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Steele Commager (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 96.

⁵⁷ Obviously, Luke has this theological scope in his literary framework of Luke-Acts by describing his other hero Paul's fated journey to Rome.

Regarding the Lukan vision of the Christian community, Luke has an epic vision similar to Vergil in that he makes a case for justifying the acceptance of the Gentiles into God's salvation. Marianne P. Bonz argues that Luke emulates Vergil's *Aeneid* for his vision of the early church in the Greco-Roman world:

Just as Vergil had created his foundational epic for the Roman people by appropriating and transforming Homer, so also did Luke create his foundational epic for the early Christian community primarily by appropriating and transforming the sacred traditions of Israel's past as narrated in the Bible of the diasporan Jewish communities, the Septuagint.⁵⁸

She considers Vergil's epic vision as emphasized in Jupiter's inaugural prophecy (*Aeneid* 1.257-96)⁵⁹ and the Sibyl's prophecy (6.83-97).⁶⁰ Just as the prophecy is programmatic for Aeneas' fated journey,⁶¹ Luke also demonstrates a theological program for Jesus through oracles, songs, or statements in chs. 1-4 by Gabriel, Mary, Zechariah, Simeon, Anna, and Jesus: this program proposes that salvation is available to all people including the Gentiles as God's good news in the Christ-event.⁶² God's redemptive purpose or plan is frequently mentioned throughout

⁵⁸ Marianne Palmer Bonz, *The Past as Legacy: Luke-Acts and Ancient Epic* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 26.

⁵⁹ Jupiter tells Venus, divine mother of Aeneas, that he will conquer a fierce people, and will impose *mores* (customs) and *moenia* (walls) on men, and will reign in Latium. For more details of the prophecy of the *Aeneid*, see James J. O'Hara, *Death and the Optimistic Prophecy in Vergil's Aeneid* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 140.

⁶⁰ This prophetess tells Aeneas that even though his great perils of the sea ceased, there will be a war between the Trojans and the Latins to found the city.

⁶¹ Bonz, 107.

⁶² R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflection," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al., vol. 9 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 20.

Luke-Acts.⁶³

For Luke, God's plan in the life-events of Jesus was fulfilled according to the Scriptures (22:37, 24:44). When Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee, his reading of Isa. 61:1-2 at the synagogue of Nazareth foretells his Messianic ministry as God's plan, by declaring, "today the Scriptures are fulfilled" (4:21). Luke frequently emphasizes that Jesus' ministry should be fulfilled as God's salvific plan, by using the term $\delta\epsilon\iota$:

But he [Jesus] said to them, "I must ($\mu\epsilon\ \delta\epsilon\iota$) proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose. (4:43)

Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must ($\delta\epsilon\iota\ \mu\epsilon$) be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem. (13:33)

Jesus "must" make his journey to Jerusalem and finish his ministry at Jerusalem because he is fated to do so according to God's plan. On the journey, Jesus' teachings demonstrate the theological truth that the Gentiles are accepted as God's new people but the Jewish people reject Jesus and his good news:

There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out. Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God. (13:28-29)

Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, "Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame." And the slave said, "Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room." Then the master said to the slave, "Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of

⁶³ The special phrase, "the purpose of God ($\eta\ \beta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\eta\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$)" occurs once in Luke and several times in Acts (Lk 7:30; Acts 2:23; 13:36; 20:27). See Culpepper, "Gospel of Luke," 20.

those who were invited will taste my dinner.” (the parable of the great dinner, 14:21-24)

The Jewish people’s rejection and the acceptance of the Gentiles are the central concern of Luke in his whole framework of Luke-Acts.

The section of the travel account is extraordinarily rich in that those teachings are appropriate for preparing Jesus’ disciples to be apostles.⁶⁴ This travel account comprises the Lukan imperatives for the disciples to preach the good news to the lowly and poor people and the Gentiles. On the way to Jerusalem, the Lukan Jesus who inaugurates the new Christian community shares the vision with the disciples by teaching the Christian values in the coming age. This vision is similarly reflected in the *Aeneid* in which, on Aeneas’ fated journey to Rome, Vergil teaches the moral and religious values for the Roman Empire. Its lesson is dramatically set in the scene of the underworld. Among the Lukan parables in the travel section, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31) is significantly placed in the middle of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem. The Lukan version of the Greek Hades combines various theological motifs in order to advance his vision for the Gentile Christian community.

Some Literary Parallels to the Parable

The many different ways in which scholars analyze the structure of the

⁶⁴ William D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 251, citing William Childs Robinson, “The Theological Context for Interpreting Luke’s Travel Narrative,” *JBL* 74 (1960): 20ff.

parable demonstrate the complexity and difficulty of the task of interpretation. Since Adolf Jülicher's *Die Gleichnisreden Jesus*,⁶⁵ even though he regarded the parts as only loosely connected, many scholars have accepted a given division of the parable into two parts: vv. 19-26 (the different lives of the rich man and poor Lazarus and then the complete and permanent reversal of fortune after death), and vv. 27-31 (the uselessness of a warning to the rich man's five brothers by someone from the dead). This long-accepted arbitrary division is related to the issue of authenticity that has been challenged since Bultmann's book, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*.⁶⁶ While some scholars still affirm that the first part of the parable (vv. 19-27) stems from Jesus, others are assigning both parts of the parable to Luke or the early church.

Based on Schnider and Stenger's article,⁶⁷ Hock challenges the arbitrary division of such a division that disregards the structural and thematic unity. Thus, comprising the unity, the literary unit can be divided into narrative (vv. 19-23) and dialogue (vv. 24-31). It can be also divided in two parts according to the change of the scene: the earthly scene (vv. 19-22) and Hades (vv. 23-31).⁶⁸ It is likely that the long-accepted arbitrary division has been influenced by scholars'

⁶⁵ Adolf Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1910), 2:634.

⁶⁶ Those who accept this two-part literary analysis are Easton, Creed, Grundmann, Bultmann, Jeremias, Ellis, Crossan, Ernst, Marshall, and Fitzmyer. See Ronald F. Hock, "Lazarus and Micyllus: Greco-Roman Backgrounds to Luke 16:19-31," *JBL* 106/3 (1987): 5 n, 449. Bultmann maintains that the early church fashioned the parable from Jewish tradition and put it into the mouth of Jesus. See his book, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 203.

⁶⁷ Franz Schnider and Werner Stenger, "Die offene Tür und die unüberschreitbare Kluft," *NTS* 25 (1978-9): 273-83.

⁶⁸ E. Pax, "Der Reiche und der armer Lazarus: eine Milieustudie," *Studii Biblici Franciscani Liber Annuus* 25 (1975): 257.

attempts to seek the origin or parallel of the first part of the parable from extra-biblical literature.

The scholarly attempt to find the origin or literary parallels for the parable begins with H. Gressmann's contention that the origin of the first part of the parable (vv. 19-26) is found in the Egyptian folktale of Si-Osiris as follows:⁶⁹

An Egyptian in Amente, the realm of the dead, was allowed to return to earth in order to deal with an Ethiopian magician who was proving too powerful for the magicians of Egypt. He was reincarnated as the miraculous child of a childless couple, Setme and his wife, and called Si-Osiris. When he reached the age of twelve, he vanquished the Ethiopian magician and returned to Amente. But before this there was an occasion when father and son observed two funerals, one of a rich man buried in sumptuous clothing and with much mourning, the other of a poor man buried without ceremony or mourning. The father declared he would rather have the lot of the rich man than the pauper, but his son expressed the wish that his father's fate in Amente would be that of the pauper rather than that of the rich man. In order to justify his wish and demonstrate the reversal of fortunes in the afterlife, he took his father on a tour of the seven halls of Amente. The account of the first three halls is lost. In the fourth and fifth halls the dead were being punished. In the fifth hall was the rich man, with the pivot of the door of the hall fixed in his eye. In the sixth hall were gods and attendants, in the seventh a scene of judgment before Osiris. The pauper was to be seen, elevated to high rank, near Osiris. Si-Osiris explains to his father what they saw, and the fate of the three classes of the dead: those whose good deeds outnumber their bad deeds (like the pauper), those whose bad deeds outnumber their good deeds (like the rich man), and those whose good and bad deeds are equal. (the story of Setme and his Son Si-Osiris)⁷⁰

Gressmann's hypothesis of the Egyptian origin for the parable has been widely

⁶⁹ Hugo Gressmann, *Vom reichen Mann und armen Lazarus: Eine literargeschichtliche Studie* (Berlin: Königliche Akademie der Wissenschaft, 1918). For the folktale itself, see Francis Ll. Griffith, *Stories of the High Priests of Memphis: The Sethon of Herodotus and the Demotic Tales of Khamuas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), 42-42. This section of the narrative (the story of two funerals and the visit to Amente) which parallels Luke 16:19-26 is included within a longer narrative from which it is relatively distinct.

⁷⁰ Citing Richard Bauckham's summary of the Egyptian tale in "The Rich Man and Lazarus: The Parable and the Parallels," *NTS* 37 (1991): 225-27. Cf. Martha Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 29-31.

accepted among scholars.⁷¹ It is argued that this Egyptian folktale was known in Palestine, as evidenced in several rabbinical versions. Bultmann, however, argued for another Jewish legend over Gressmann's folktale as the source for the parable.⁷² Ronald F. Hock also challenges Gressmann's hypothesis because the parallels between the Egyptian folktale and the parable are neither as compelling nor as explanatory as an interpretive key.⁷³ He contends that the parable does not make use of a tour of the underworld or the descent (καταβάσεις) into the underworld like the Egyptian folktale. The main reason why he rejects this folktale as a literary parallel and interpretive key for the parable is that the folktale does not explain the rationale for the reversal of fortunes of the rich man and Lazarus.

Bauckham points out that the differences between the parable and the folktale make a case that the folktale has no explanatory value in interpreting the parable itself. Further, the second part of the parable (vv. 27-31) appears to be

⁷¹ For the lists of scholars who accept the folktale as lying behind vv. 19-26, see Hock, ~~6 n. 449.~~ 449, n. 6.

⁷² The Palestinian Talmud as the earliest version of the Egyptian folktale was suggested by Gressmann. The story tells of a rich tax-collector named Bar Mayan and a poor Torah scholar in Ashkelon. They die on the same day, but whereas the tax-collector is buried in style, the poor pious man is unmourned. A friend of his is troubled by the contrast, until in a dream he sees the poor man in paradise and the tax-collector tormented in hell. His punishment is tantalization: he continually tries to drink from a river but cannot. The friend of the poor man also sees a certain Miriam being punished in hell (according to one report she hangs by her breasts, but according to another the hinge of the gate rests in her ear). He learns that the poor man sinned once in his life; while the rich man performed one good deed in his life. The splendid funeral of the rich man was his reward for his one good deed, while the poor man's one sin was punished by his dying neglected. This is my summary from Bauckham, 227, translated from Gerd A. Wewers, *Sanhedrin in Gerichtshof*, Übersetzung des Talmud Yerushalmi 4/4 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1981), 148-49.

⁷³ Ronald F. Hock, "Lazarus and Miccyllus: Greco-Roman Backgrounds to Luke 16:19-31," *JBL* 106/3 (1987): 453.

very important for understanding the parable as a whole, but it has no parallel in the folktale and other literature. Thus Hock suggests another literary parallel from the literature by and about Cynics: the *Gallus* and the *Catapulus* by Lucian of Samosata (the 2nd century C.E.).⁷⁴

Many scholarly attempts fail to find the direct literary parallels from ancient sources because those sources show nothing but the simple popular motif of the reversal of fortunes in the afterlife and tours of Hades, which were already popular religious themes among the ancient people in the Greco-Roman world. The point that scholars miss in finding the parallels from the extra-biblical sources is the larger literary context of the travel account (Lk 9:51-19:44). Luke is dependent on the Homeric themes and motifs as well as on Vergil's literary framework, in that Luke's μύμησις in the Greco-Roman world demonstrates the Greek influence on the Lukan scene of Hades. Among the various aspects of μύμησις as a literary phenomenon in the Greco-Roman world, Luke appears to use the two outstanding works of the Greco-Roman literature, Homer's *Odyssey* and

⁷⁴ Hock, "Lazarus and Micylus," 453, argues that the characterization of the rich man was known to the Greco-Roman world around Luke's time. In the *Gallus* and the *Catapulus*, Lucian of Samosata describes the misfortunes of the poor shoemaker Micylus. While the character of the rich man is Eucrates in the former, the rich man in the latter is the tyrant Megapenthes. The characterizations of the rich are their purple clothing (προφύραθ) and banquets. Their fortunes are reversed at their deaths. In the *Catapulus* ("Trip to Hades"), Megapenthes creates a similar scene of the dialogue between Abraham and the rich man in torment, on his way down to Hades. He tries to persuade the fate Clotho to let him return to his house by saying that he wants to complete the unfinished works of his earthly life. But he fails to win the favor of Clotho. Finally, Rhadamanthus, the judge of the underworld, judges each by inspecting the soul for any marks (στίγματα) of sins. As Micylus' soul is free of stigmata, he is sent to the Isles of the Blessed, there to recline with the heroes. But Megapenthes is condemned, not allowed to drink the water of Lethe, so that he should remember all that he once had. In terms of the characterization of Megapenthes, his wealth proved to be amassed by perjury, robbery, and duplicity and living by violence, arrogance, and disregard for justice (My summary from Hock's article, 447-63).

Vergil's *Aeneid*.⁷⁵ If the travel account is regarded as Jesus' νόστος (the return to the Jerusalem Temple, his Father's house), the scene of Hades in the parable (16:19-31) is more meaningfully placed in the travel account, just as Homer and Vergil used the heroic descent to Hades as the significant literary placement in the epic drama.

Homeric Influences on the Lukan Scene of Hades

As a literary and theological connection with the previous parable of the unjust steward (16:1-8a), "eternal tents" (16:9) is more specifically referred to as the Greek Hades in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The steward in crisis wishes to be received (δέξωμαι) into the house of the sympathetic public when he is dismissed by his master. The Jewish hope to enter the eternal house of God is already seen in the prodigal son's wish to return to his father's house,⁷⁶ which, I suppose, might also reflect a Lukan literary framework of Νόστος. The term δέχομαι expresses "the reaction to action on the other side."⁷⁷ Mark and Q use this term as people's response to Jesus and his disciples as the divine emissaries (Mt 10:40, Mk 9:37). More generally this is used for the

⁷⁵ Thomas L. Brodie argues that Luke's style has been described as a μίμησις of the style of the Septuagint that was adopted as a normative text. See his essay, "Greco-Roman Imitation of Texts as a Partial Guide to Luke's Use of Sources," in *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar*, ed. Charles H. Talbert (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1984), 32-34.

⁷⁶ John Duncan M. Derrett, "Fresh Light on St. Luke XVI: II. Dives and Lazarus and the Preceding Sayings," *NTS* 7 (1961): 372.

⁷⁷ Walter Grundmann, "δέχομαι," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 50.

reception of the word of God or the good news (Mk 10:15, Lk 8:13). In the ancient world, δέχομαι is used for hospitality for guests because it is everywhere honored and regarded as sacred in terms of the Homeric value.

Luke clearly shows the audience that the eschatological welcoming involves “friends” as well as God. The Jewish hope for the eternal tents (εἰς τὰς αἰωνίους σκηνάς, 16:9b) is radically related with God’s solidarity with the needy or the poor. While Luke rephrases the Jewish hope for the eternal dwelling (σκηνή)⁷⁸ with the Homeric value of the hospitality of strangers (“friends”) in 16:1-9, he also transforms “the eternal dwelling” into the Greek Hades because Hades (ᾍδης) is one of the popular themes of the Greco-Roman world.

Luke is not interested in suggesting to the audience any specific reason for the great reversal of fortunes, unlike the Egyptian folktale or its Jewish versions. Luke simply focuses on the injustice of human life: one man lived in luxury while another was destitute.⁷⁹ Luke shows the audience how the contrasting lives continue until death: while the rich man enjoys his sumptuous lifestyle, Lazarus is laid (ἐβέβλητο) helplessly full of sores at the gate of the rich man. Ordinary poor people’s only hope is the eschatological justice of God in the next world, a theme that is already popular in the religious folklore and Jewish apocalypticism prior to the time of Luke.⁸⁰ The next world compensates for the inequality of

⁷⁸ The term σκηνή occurs 20 times in the NT: ten of the instances are in the Letter to the Hebrews. Luke follows the LXX version in quoting Amos 5:25-27 in Acts 7:43, and Amos 9:11 in Acts 15:16. Luke uses it in light of the cultic tent. See Wilhelm Michaelis, “σκηνή” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 374.

⁷⁹ Bauckham, “Rich Man and Lazarus,” 232.

⁸⁰ See, especially, “the Epistle of Enoch” in *1 Enoch* (chs. 91-108), which certainly

this life by replacing it with a reverse inequality. Just as the injustice of this life is crude, so is the notion of justice involved in the reversal of fortunes.

Luke emphasizes that only the death of both men brings change, and that change is a reversal. This reversal of fortunes is significantly justified by Abraham when the rich man in torment asks him for mercy:

But Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here [Hades], and you are in agony." (16:25)

Abraham's words are told in a chiastic abb'a' pattern by which the narrator demonstrates the life and the death of two men: first the rich man is described (v. 19), then the poor man (vv. 20-21), then the death of the poor man (v. 22a), then that of the rich man (vv. 22b-23a).⁸¹ As the scene changes from earth to Hades, the reversal of fortunes now continues from the rich man's point of view. Hades, which Luke describes in the narrative, is the realm of the dead with adjoining quarters, which are separated by a big chasm, for sinners and saved. The Greek term Hades, which is usually used to translate the Hebrew term *Sheol*, means the place of the dead, but not necessarily a place of torment for the wicked dead.⁸² Hades, which originally refers to the underworld of the shades or

demonstrates the eschatological reversal of fortunes of the sinful rich and the righteous poor. James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 72-89.

⁸¹ Outi Lehtipuu, "Characterization and Persuasion: the Rich Man and the Poor Man in Luke 16:19-31," in *Characterization in the Gospels: Reconceiving Narrative Criticism*, ed. David Rhoads and Kari Syreeni (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 90. See also Bauckham, "Rich Man and Lazarus," 231. This kind of a chiastic pattern is typical of Luke's reversal sayings, such as 1:52-53, 14:11, and 18:14.

⁸² Richard Bauckham, "Hades, Hell" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel

the souls of the dead, became the temporary abode of the dead between death and judgment.

In the development of the idea of Hades as an amalgam formed from various sources such as the Egyptian netherworld, Greek afterlife, Persian retribution, and the Jewish apocalyptic eternal torment in *Gehenna*,⁸³ Luke's picture of Hades is surely influenced by Persian and Hellenistic pictures of the underworld.⁸⁴ Only Luke 16:33, among the New Testament passages referring to Hades, portrays it as a place of punishment for human beings.⁸⁵ Luke's change of scene from earth to Hades still continues his theme of stewardship of "riches" in that the god, Hades, is considered as the god of riches and materials as implied in his other name, Dis or Pluto (πλούτος, riches)⁸⁶ in the Greco-Roman world.⁸⁷ Furthermore, Luke makes the great reversal of fortunes serious by using the amalgam image of Hades from various religious sources. It is likely that this image would appeal to his audience of the Greco-Roman world. More specifically, the Hades scene in Luke will draw the audience to the Homeric

Freedman et al., vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 14-5. The special prison of sinners is called *Tartaros* which is located in the deepest place of Hades.

⁸³ Ibid. See also Michael Ball, "The Parables of the Unjust Steward and the Rich Man and Lazarus," *ExpTim* 106 (1995): 11.

⁸⁴ *1 Enoch* 22 has clear affinities with the Lukan picture of Hades in terms of the separating quarters for the four different classes of the dead. Thus, Larry Kreitzer argues that *1 Enoch* 22 is a possible background source for Luke's use of the Hades imagery in the parable, by citing the original argument of Laurence W. Grensted. See his article, "Luke 16:19-31 and *1 Enoch* 22," *ExpTim* 103 (1992): 140-41.

⁸⁵ Joel Marcus, "The Gates of Hades and the Keys of the Kingdom (Matt. 16:18-10)," *CBQ* 50 (1988): 444.

⁸⁶ See 1 Cor. 1:5; 4:8

⁸⁷ The Greek Hades scene might be also strengthened by the appearance of the dog in this parable because the dog-monster, Cerberus, is the gatekeeper of Hades.

nekyia.

The dialogue in Hades between Abraham and the dead rich man is similar to the Homeric *nekyia* where Odysseus questions the ghosts and specially the blind prophet Teiresias in the realm of the dead by way of a necromantic ritual to summon the spirits of the dead. In this regard, MacDonald sees this story as a tour of hell, but not a parable.⁸⁸ What the tradition of descent to Hades seems to have revealed is the fate of souls after death. The old Homeric view is that the existence of the dead is undifferentiated because all share the joyless gloom, even though there are exceptions: on the one hand, Tantalus, Tityos, and Sisyphus who are punished eternally for their crimes against the gods (*Od.* 11.576-600), and on the other hand a very few heroes of divine descent, like Menelaus, who are exempted from the common lot and dwell in blessedness in Elysium.⁸⁹ This Homeric *nekyia* has been elaborated as the growing belief in retribution and reward after death since Plato. Already in Luke, the later development of punishment and reward in Hades is obvious. When Luke describes the rich man in torment in Hades, Luke has in mind the figure of “Tantalus”⁹⁰ in Hades (*Od.* 11.582-92) as he describes the specific type of punishment: “tantalization” of the rich man; even though the rich man in Hades longs to have his tongue cooled, his thirst is not satisfied. Vergil also imitates this famous section of the

⁸⁸ MacDonald, “*A Synopsis*,” pericope no. 228.

⁸⁹ Bauckham, “Descent to the Underworld,” 153.

⁹⁰ The English word “tantalize” is derived from Homer’s description of Tantalus: in Hades, Tantalus stands up to his chin in water that recedes as he attempts to drink it, while the tempting fruit on trees above him evades his grasp.

punishment by tantalization in Hades in *Aeneid* 6.⁹¹

The motifs of reversal and tantalization are seen in the story of the Setme tale and its version of the Palestinian Talmud. As Himmelfarb, however, argues, tantalization originated in classical Greece and thus was available to writers of the Greco-Roman period.⁹² Luke appears to use this Homeric theme of tantalization to describe the fate of the rich man in Hades for the divine justice of “a measure-for-measure punishment: inability to control the desire to eat in this world leads to the inability to partake of food in the next world.”⁹³ The Lukan motif of food from the lives of the rich man and Lazarus continues in the reversal of fortunes by using the Homeric punishment of tantalization.

Another famous tour of Hades before Luke is Aeneas’ descent into the underworld in *Aeneid* 6, where the Trojan hero Aeneas with the Sibyl as guide, went to Hades to see his dead father Anchises in Elysium. While Aeneas transverses between mortal and immortal on his trip to Hades, Odysseus does not enter the realm of the dead, but brings the souls out at the mouth of Hades. The *Aeneid* clearly shows a place of punishment (Tartarus) and the Isle of the Blessed (Elysium). It should be also noted that Luke’s scene of Hades in the parable is closer to Plato’s story of Er, the Pamphylian, who was killed in battle (*Republic* 10.614b-21b) and saw as a disembodied soul both “a place of torment”

⁹¹ *Aeneid* 6.603-7: “High festal couches gleam with frames of gold, and before their eyes is spread a banquet in royal splendour. Yet, reclining hard by, the eldest Fury stays their hands from touch of the table, springing forth with uplifted torch and thousand cries.” Translation from H. Rushton Fairclough, trans. *Virgil in Two Volumes*, rev. ed., vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 549.

⁹² Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 81.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 92.

and “a place of bliss” in Hades. The well-known accounts of descents to Hades must have played an important part in making retribution in the afterlife a very common belief in the Hellenistic world. It is certain that Luke also makes use of this genre for his theological purpose.

Luke's Christianizing the *Descensus* Tradition

Literary and Theological Agenda (Abraham's Bosom)

What is strange to the audience is the presence of Abraham in Hades. Does Luke present Abraham as one of the divine underworld figures who guide or judge them? The existence of Abraham in Hades seems completely out of place in an afterworld setting.⁹⁴ The placement of Abraham in Hades, however, plays an important role in understanding the parable as a whole because Luke sees Abraham as the first blessed of the kingdom of God among the people of God who will come from every corner of the earth:

There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out. Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God. Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.” (Lk 13:28-30)

⁹⁴ In the Egyptian domain of the dead, the divine figures of Osiris, Horus, Anubis, and Maat appear, while in the Greek Hades, such figures as Dis (Hades, or Pluto), Hecate, Persephone, Charon, Hermes, Minos, Rhadamanthus, and Aeacus are the underworld figures.

Luke uses Abraham as a spokesperson for God who justifies the reversal of fortunes of the two men. As “a median figure”⁹⁵ or character, Abraham functions to draw a dialogue with the rich man in torment. It is likely that the polemic of who the true children of Abraham are comes into play in this underworld dialogue between Abraham and the Jewish rich man. Luke 3:7-9 (Q 3:7-9) demonstrates that John the Baptist criticizes the Jews who are proud of themselves by saying, “we have Abraham for our father.” Luke advances his theology to redefine the family of Abraham: a crippled woman as “a daughter of Abraham” who was healed and was set free from Satan by Jesus (13:10-17), and Zacchaeus as “a son of Abraham” who was lost and repented (19:1-9). In this parable, Lazarus’ fortune is reversed in Hades because he comes to have “friendship” with Abraham.⁹⁶

By the bosom (κόλπος) of Abraham, Luke may mean that Lazarus “goes to his ancestors” or “lies down with his ancestors,” which is used from the Old Testament expression of “dying.”⁹⁷ But here the term “bosom” appears to symbolize “blessings” or “an honorary place for a guest at a Messianic banquet”⁹⁸ which includes Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, all the prophets, and all people from east and west, from north and south in the kingdom of God (12:28). In the Greek underworld, “the bosom of Abraham” might be expressed as Elysium where the heroes bask in eternal joy and blessings, while

⁹⁵ Lehtipuu, “Characterization and Persuasion,” 83-4. He argues that in a “dramatic triangle” of three characters, two of the characters are juxtaposed by a common status but contrasted by their relationship to the third character who is a median figure in the story, by relying heavily on Gerhard Sellin, “Lukas als Gleichniserzähler: Die Erzählung vom barmherzigen Samariter (Lk 10:25-37),” *ZNW* 65 (1974): 166-89; 66 (1975): 19-60.

⁹⁶ Abraham is called “a friend of God” (2 Chron. 20:7). He is also known for his hospitality (Gen. 18:1-15).

⁹⁷ Lehtipuu, “Characterization and Persuasion,” 97.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

“reclining”⁹⁹ at the banquet table. Lazarus was laid helplessly at the gate of the house where the rich man feasted sumptuously every day. After death, however, a complete reversal happens. They switch positions in Hades and are separated now by a “great chasm,”¹⁰⁰ just as the rich man’s gate of his house and a dog (the gatekeeper like Cerberus of Hades) make a separation between the outside and the inside. In the end, Lazarus is carried away by an angel to the bosom of Abraham (16:22).

Since Abraham is called “father,” this place (bosom) can be thus called “a father’s house.”¹⁰¹ The rich man in torment refers to his earthly hometown as “my father’s house” (16:27). Here, again Luke uses the Homeric motif of “the returning to the father’s house” (νόστος) to emphasize that Lazarus (the disinherited and unprivileged) returns to the father’s house (the bosom of Abraham) to enjoy the Messianic banquet by reclining at the bosom of the ancestral hero. In the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32), the prodigal son is finally accepted once more into his father’s bosom (“hugging and kissing”) and the father celebrates the son’s homecoming (νόστος) at the feast.

The figure of Abraham in Hades is a part of the Lukan polemics against the Jewish community who rejects salvation for the Gentiles. Some scholars make suggestions to account for the naming of the poor man in the parable.¹⁰² The most

⁹⁹ Lucian’s *Cataplus* recounts that the dead Micyllus is sent to Elysium to recline with the heroes, which represents the blessedness of the afterlife.

¹⁰⁰ This phrase refers to the compartmentalization of the underworld whose idea was started by Greeks. See Plato, *Gorgias* 524-26; *Phaedo* 113-14.

¹⁰¹ Walter Vogels, “Having or Longing: A Semiotic Analysis of Luke 16:19-31,” *ÉgT* 20 (1989): 40.

¹⁰² Cyril H. Cave, “Lazarus and the Lukan Deuteronomy,” *NTS* 15 (1969): 323. See also Derrett, 371.

reasonable is that Lazarus is named because of Abraham.¹⁰³ The linking of Abraham and Lazarus recalls Gen. 15 where Abraham laments that he is childless, and that “Eliezer”¹⁰⁴ of Damascus will be his heir. In this regard, Lazarus’ presence in the parable might symbolize a Gentile or a proselyte. It, however, appears that the meaning of the name *Lazarus* is more significant in its characterization. Lazarus (“God helps”) is a helpless, disinherited, and unprivileged person. Only God can help him. Luke is likely to characterize this Lazarus as “a paradigmatic or functional character”¹⁰⁵ or *exemplum* to show a disadvantaged character against the rich man who is also an *exemplum* of the rejection of God’s purpose by a Jew.¹⁰⁶ For rhetorical purposes, Luke describes Lazarus as a counter-character against the rich man and his five Jewish brothers. The dialogue between Abraham and the rich man serves as a rhetorical justification for the reversal of fortunes. Further on, Luke advances to the second part of the parable (16:27-31) for his main point.¹⁰⁷

What would come as a surprise in 16:27-31 is Abraham’s second refusal of the rich man’s request; while the first request is denied in spite of his appealing to the relationship between Abraham (father) and himself (child), the second request to send

¹⁰³ Lazarus is only the named person among the figures of the Lukan parables. Therefore scholars tend to see its significance from the context of Abraham.

¹⁰⁴ The name Lazarus is a grecianized, shortened form of Hebrew or Aramaic *Eleazar*. Josephus uses the fuller Greek from *Eleazaros* for over twenty persons. For more details on the name, see Fitzmeyer, *Gospel According To Luke*, 2:1131.

¹⁰⁵ Lehtipuu, 85.

¹⁰⁶ Frank W. Hughes, “The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16.19-31) and Greco-Roman Rhetoric,” in *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 39. This parable was categorized as *Beispielergählungen* (example narratives) with other three Lukan parables by Adolf Jülicher in *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, vol. 1 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1910), 112.

¹⁰⁷ Fitzmeyer, *Gospel According To Luke*, 2:1128, notes that J. Jeremias and T. W. Manson take this position.

Lazarus to his brothers to let them have a chance to repent is also rejected. Unlike the folkloric motif in which the dead person returns to warn the living person of the fates of the underworld, Abraham refuses any possibility that the dead person can return to the earth, and any sign which might cause the rich man's five brothers to repent. In the dialogue, the rich man thinks that Moses and the prophets are not enough because they still lack knowledge. A person from the dead would give his brothers complete information. Luke, however, emphasizes that even though such a resurrection or tour of hell may happen,¹⁰⁸ they (his five Jewish brothers) will not listen. These somewhat ambiguous words manifest the *Sitz im Leben* of the early church when the Christian evangelization of the Jews continues to fail.¹⁰⁹ I think that Abraham's refusal indicates Luke's programmatic treatment of Judaism and the Jews who reject the good news of God through the Messianic ministry of Jesus. In this respect, the second part of the parable is very programmatic in terms of Luke's view of the Jews.

Lukan *Nekyia* in Jesus' *Nostos*

For the Greco-Roman world, descents to Hades (*nekylia*) were more than stories about the gods and heroes. This can be also seen in the Sumerian myth of Inanna and Dumuzi or the Ugaritic myth of Baal and Mot, or the Greek myth of Demeter and

¹⁰⁸ This reference to the return of the dead person might be supposed as Jesus' resurrection or Lazarus' resurrection in John 11.

¹⁰⁹ Hughes, "Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus," 40, maintains that the lack of a proper name for the rich man, coupled with the inclusion of the unmistakable identification of the rich man with Judaism in this parable, means that the reader is encouraged to think that the rich man could be not merely any rich person, but in fact any rich Jew.

Persephone, or the mythical descents of Heracles and Orpheus. Rather, they function as an “apocalyptic revelation” for the fate of souls in the netherworld.¹¹⁰ They were models that could in some sense be imitated, most importantly in the experience of initiation into the mysteries, which dispelled the terrors of the underworld and secured a blessed immortality for the initiate.¹¹¹ Plato’s Socrates uses the tale of the dead Er to lead the audience to pursuing “righteousness with wisdom” (*Republic* 612C) in the earthly life by letting the dead Er be revived to tell humankind or the audience his tour of Hades and the fate of souls as a heavenly messenger (614D). Plato tells his *nekyia* (the story of Er) at the end of the *Republic* to teach the importance of the ethical life in this world, following the lesson of the Homeric *nekyia* where the dead Achilles expresses his hope for a living slavery rather than being a king over the dead in Hades (*Od.* 11.489-91).¹¹²

Luke also recounts a *nekyia* to build his theological case that God accepts the Gentiles as his chosen people in this world through the Christ-event. While the Jews reject the good news and Jesus, Lazarus (the poor, disinherited person like the Gentiles) is accepted into Abraham’s bosom in Hades as the eschatological fulfillment of God’s salvific plan. The second part of the parable (16:27-31) would reflect the Jewish rejection of the Jesus movement and the failure of the Christian mission to the Jews in the early church. The rich man and his five Jewish brothers fail to repent in spite of having

¹¹⁰ Himmelfarb calls this a “tour apocalypse.” See her article, “From Prophecy to Apocalypse: The Book of the Watchers and Tours of Heaven,” in *Jewish Spirituality*, vol. 1, *From the Bible through the Middle Ages*, ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1986), 146-47.

¹¹¹ Bauckham, “Descent to the Underworld,” 150.

¹¹² Achilles’ lament in Hades shows a concern for the living by the dead. Alcinous in Hades also expresses his concern for the living comrades (11.370-76). This concern for the living ones by the dead is similar to the rich man’s concern for his five living brothers. For this connection, see Michael J. Gilmour, “Hints of Homer in Luke 16:19-31?” *Didaskalia* 10/2 (1999): 29-30.

“Moses and the prophets.” Polemically, Luke emphasizes the uselessness of the resurrected person’s message and rejects the possibility of a return from death, as seen in the tour of hell.

It appears that Luke omits any necromantic rite to visit the underworld or any possibility for the living person to be able to go to the realm of the dead or any possibility for the dead person to return to the living, even though he is dependent on the popular genre of *nekyia* or *katabasis* into Hades, in which the boundary between the living and the dead is broken, prior to his time. With the omissions of the visiting of the living person to Hades or the returning of the dead from it, Luke invites his audience to the scene of Hades as the judgment of earthly lives (rich vs. poor; believing vs. non-believing) in order to assure them of their acceptance into the Christian community in the present world. In the Lukan *nekyia*, Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom in Hades creates a Lukan polemic against the lives of the rich man and his five brothers who are likely to represent Judaism in Luke’s time.

While Socrates tells his *nekyia* for moral teaching,¹¹³ Luke uses his *nekyia* for the theological case for the Gentile Christian community. What is significant in using the genre of *nekyia* is that Luke puts it in the context of the travel account (9:51-19:44). The larger literary context demonstrates that Jesus’ last journey to the Jerusalem Temple is a kind of νόστος to “the Father’s House” (the Temple). The scene of the Temple - cleansing as a dramatic homecoming is similar to Odysseus’ cleansing his house of the suitors. In the middle of νόστος, the *nekyia* functions as an intensification of a necessity of the journey and its future success. The Lukan *nekyia* also foretells the success of the

¹¹³ For more details, see Dennis R. MacDonald, *Christianizing Homer: The Odyssey, Plato, and The Acts of Andrew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 96-100.

so-called “the Way (ὁ ὁδός)”¹¹⁴ in spite of the Jewish rejection, in similar ways of Homer and Vergil. The purpose of Luke’s mimetic literary practice of the Homeric motifs of *nostos* and *nekyia* is very much apologetic.

In spite of Luke’s reservation about the popular Greek *nekyia*, which results in his omissions of some motifs, he also used this for his theological agenda. Luke proclaims to his audience that the Gentile Christian will enjoy the blessings of Elysium like the heroes of the Christian faith. Just as Jesus’ *nostos* ends with his being at the Jerusalem Temple (the Father’s House), the *nostoi* of the Christians as the children of Abraham will end with reclining at the bosom of Abraham (the father’s house). The mimetic adaptation of the Greek *descensus* tradition into a Lukan theological purpose would produce this distinctive parable of the Hades scene. Jesus’ fated last journey to Jerusalem and the afterlife judgment can be the favorite Homeric motifs. The Latin epic, *Aeneid*, also helps Luke with his literary production of this parable. The mimetic literary use of the *descensus* by Luke could be compared to Paul’s appropriation of the Hellenistic *descensus* tradition for his Christological affirmation of Christ’s humiliation and exaltation as well as to John’s distinctive theological consideration of Jesus’ descent as the gnostic redeemer’s coming to the world.

¹¹⁴ William D. Davies notes that Luke provides the notices of movement and destination because he wants to present Jesus’ activity in terms of a journey, representing the Christian movement as “the Way” (Lk 9:31; 13:33; Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). See his book, *Gospel and the Land*, 251.

CHAPTER 4

Pauline Thought of the *Descensus* and *Ascensus* of Christ

The Christological appropriation of the *descensus* tradition begins with Paul who appears to know several descent myths such as the Hellenistic Sophia speculation, the old Jewish Watcher myth, and early Jewish descent and ascent. He rejects and yet uses them to assert Christ's lordship through his humiliation and exaltation. His Hellenistic cosmology makes him appropriate Christ's enthronement on a cosmic level.

Christ's Humiliation and Exaltation

"Christ is the Sophia": Argument against the Sophia Speculation: 1 Cor. 1-2

For Gnostic cosmology, the world or creation is seen as a disorder or problem to some degree, whether the evil Demiurge created the material world or the world is still sustained by the good God. When God is considered as the first *arche* who contains all in Oneself as in Middle Platonism, some distinctions (the unbegotten God, Logos, or World-Soul) within the godhead begin to relate to the material world. When evil still persists in the world, the Gnostics find the origin of evil in the nature of creation beyond the physical world. Gnosticism hypostatizes the eternal thoughts of the highest God as aeons and then ascribes the creation of the material world to the ignorant Demiurge as the

son of the hypostatized passion of Sophia.¹ In this myth-making, the fall of Sophia functions to explain the creation of the world, while the Sophia figure is actually the hero of history.² Whether the description of the gnostic Sophia in Sethianism and Valentinianism differs to some extent,³ the myth underlies the point that Sophia is the initiator or instrument of creation by which the Demiurge came into being and created the material world.

For the Gnostics, the world itself is like a Hades where humans are enslaved to demonic powers. From the perspective of the gnostic conceptualization of the history of salvation, the gnostic myth of the redeemer's descent into history or this world, but not into Hades, is based on the dualistic view of the world (the intelligible world vs. the material world of darkness). When the Gnostics develop the myth of Sophia, the redemptive descent of Sophia as "her repentance and eventual rehabilitation into the Pleroma"⁴ functions as soteriological and eschatological. It is likely that while the eschatological action of the *descensus* of Sophia has been conceptualized to attain the Pleroma in the ritual, as the Sethian baptismal rites symbolize the threefold descent of the redeemer figure (Sophia, Christ, or Seth),⁵ the Sophia descent myth is appropriated and used by Paul who rejects the claim of the opponents in the Corinthian church.

¹ See the Valentinian appropriation of the Sophia Myth, Irenaeus, *AH* 1.1-8, and 1.11.

² Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 321-26. For the saving role of pre-existent Sophia in history, see Wisdom 7:24-27; 8:10; 9:9-11.

³ George W. MacRae, "The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth," *NovT* 12 (1972): 86-100, argues that the distinctive Valentinian version of the Sophia myth is its two Sophia figures (a higher and a lower) and the motivation of the fall of Sophia; cf. see G. Christopher Stead, "The Valentinian Myth of Sophia," *JTS* 20 (1969): 75-104.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 92. MacRae points out that Sophia's repentance and return to the Pleroma are shared as a common theme by Sethians and Valentinians.

⁵ The earlier Sethian gnosticized text of the myth of Sophia's descent (the so-called

The myth of Sophia with its motif of salvation history, in which the problem of evil is explained as the fall of Sophia and solved as her restoration/ rehabilitation to the Pleroma, could be accepted in a Christian teaching that rejects the humiliation of Christ's Cross. Against this Christianized Hellenistic teaching of Sophia, however, Paul openly proclaims, "Christ is the Sophia" (1 Cor. 1:30).⁶ It seems that when Jesus Christ began to be regarded as "wisdom" in the early church,⁷ the myth of Sophia could be used and applied to Christology in various ways.

Based on Conzelmann's study,⁸ Pearson sees Paul's or the Pauline school's disclaim of wisdom in 1 Cor. 1:10-4:21, as opposed to the Hellenistic-Jewish wisdom speculation, of which Philo is the best representative.⁹ Paul rejects human wisdom as "of this age" and "futile." His rejection of the wisdom speculation by the opponents is more emphasized in a way of apocalyptic dualism between this age and the age to come

Pronoia Hymn) in the end of the longer version of the *Apocalypse of John* (NHC II, 1.30.12-31) has been expanded and systematized in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (NHC XIII, 1.47.7-20; 48:31-35; 50.9-11). PHEME PERKINS argues that this threefold descent of the Redeemer figure is actualized in a way of "the tripartite periodization of history, revelation or judgment." See her article, "Apocalypse of Adam: The Genre and Function of a Gnostic Apocalypse," *CBQ* 39 (1977): 387-89. The descent of the redeemer, conceptualized in the baptismal rite, is also seen in the *Apocalypse of Adam* (NHC V, 5.83.4-7), *On the Origin of the World* (NHC II, 108.28-109.1), the *Gospel of Egyptians* (NHC III, 2.62.24-64.9).

⁶ Gregory J. Riley's class lecture in NT 445 "Paul and Pauline School," 2005, at Claremont School of Theology, argues from the textual variants, that in 1 Cor. 2:4 Paul counterattacks the opponent's claim on Sophia's role in the cosmic salvific drama, which is connoted in *πειθοῖ Σοφίας*.

⁷ See James M. Robinson, "Jesus as Sophos and Sophia: Wisdom Tradition and the Gospels," in *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Robert L. Wilken (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 1-16; John S. Kloppenborg, "Wisdom Christology in Q," *LavTP* 33/34 (1977-78): 129-47.

⁸ Hans Conzelmann, "Paulus und die Weisheit," *NTS* 12 (1965-66): 231-44.

⁹ Birger A. Pearson, "Hellenistic-Jewish Wisdom Speculation and Paul," in *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Robert L. Wilken (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 43-66.

and thereby the wisdom of this age is degraded as the “rulers of this age” (2:6, 8):

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom (*Sophia*) of God. (1 Cor. 1:18-24)

As some scholars argue, if the opponent of this *Sophia* speculation is considered as “gnostic”¹⁰ or a certain group within Hellenistic-Jewish wisdom tradition, the self-claimed possession of wisdom by this group could be more evident when the term, wisdom, is used as a personified and hypostatized “*Sophia*” whose descent myth has been articulated in Hellenistic Judaism and pre-Christian Gnosticism.

As supportive evidence of the *Sophia* myth in the opponent’s claim, Paul rejects the “persuasiveness of wisdom” (πειθοῦ[ς] σοφίας) in his speech and his proclamation (1 Cor. 2:4). Zuntz argues for the evidence for the intrinsically superior, short reading of πειθοῦ σοφίας, even though P⁴⁶ reads πειθοῖς σοφίας and no extant text supports Zuntz’s claim.¹¹ Based on the unrecorded and irregular form of the adjective πειθός,¹² the supposed combination form, πειθοῦ σοφίας, appears to refer to the descending work

¹⁰ The main scholars for this claim are Ulrich Wilckens, *Weisheit und Torheit, Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschiliche Untersuchung zu 1 Kor. 1 und 2* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1959) and Walther Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971).

¹¹ Günther Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles* (London: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 1953), 3-25. The eleven different variant readings in this passage indicate their scribal glossary and secondary additions to clarify the meaning of σοφίας. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Biblegesellschaft; United Bible Societies, 1994), 481.

¹² Zuntz, 24, suggests that the corresponding adjective to the verb πείθω is πειθάνός.

(πείρω) of Sophia in the world for her people. While Zuntz does not indicate the myth-related work of Sophia in this phrase, Pearson notes here “a certain type of wisdom” in Paul’s opponents.¹³ Paul denies any other work of the savior figure like Sophia, by asserting, “Christ is the wisdom of God” (1:24, 30).

Paul’s reworking of wisdom theology or the Sophia myth against his opponents focuses on “another builder” who builds their teaching on a different foundation.¹⁴ For Paul, the only foundation is Jesus Christ (3:11). But the wisdom teaching (“eloquent wisdom”) of the opponents is considered to “empty the Cross of its power” (1:17). Paul, however, emphasizes the centrality of the Cross because it is revealed as “foolish” and yet “secret and hidden” (2:7). This Pauline understanding of God’s wisdom in Jesus appears to originate from the Jesus tradition. While Matthew sees Jesus as heavenly wisdom (Mt 11:19, 23:34), Luke considers him a child of wisdom (Lk 7:35, 11:49). Interestingly, the Q community sees Jesus as personified wisdom (Mt 11:25; Q 10:21), as seen in Proverbs 8, while he overturns the wisdom tradition of the wise and the intelligent by saying that the hidden wisdom is now revealed to the infants (νήπιος). As the Q community sees Jesus as a greater wisdom teacher than the traditional wisdom value in Judaism and Greek tradition, so does Paul in the hidden and secret wisdom of Jesus’ Cross.¹⁵

Some circle in the Corinthian church seems to fall into a sense of elitism, based

¹³ Pearson, “Hellenistic-Jewish Wisdom Speculation,” 50.

¹⁴ For the scholarly summary of the Corinthian opponents, see John C. Hurd, Jr., *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, new ed. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 97-113.

¹⁵ Riley, in his class lecture of NT 303 “Perspectives on the New Testament,” 2003 at Claremont School of Theology, indicates that Mt 11:28-30 shows that Jesus’ wisdom teaching on the value of “humility” (ταπεινοφροσύνη, Acts 20:19; Col. 2:18, 23), by emphasizing his πρᾶξις (base) and ταπεινός (humble) yoke, overturns the Greek value of μεγαλοφροσύνη (magnanimity).

on the possession of Sophia, when they segregate themselves as τελείοις (“mature,” 2:6) and πνευματικός (“spiritual,” 2:15), whereas they disregard other Christians as νήπιος (“infant,” 3:1) and ψυχικός (“soulish,” 2:14).¹⁶ Paul is polemical against their “boasting” (1:31; 3:21) of the teaching of the “mystery” (μυστήριον, 2:1) and the depths (βάθος, 2:10)¹⁷ of God, by appealing to the secret and hidden wisdom of the Cross. Paul’s argument on the “lofty word or wisdom” (ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας, 2:1) reflects a kind of Philonic language of wisdom mythology in which such concepts as *physis*, *pneuma*, *dynamis*, *logos*, *Sophia*, and *nous* were turned into soteriological mediating figures from God.¹⁸ While Paul rejects the myth-making lofty Logos or Sophia who is descending, he proclaims that Jesus is the Sophia whose descending is hidden and disguised to the “rulers (ἄρχων) of this age:”

But we speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the *rulers of this age* understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Cor. 2:7-8)

Paul seems to know the gnostic descent of the savior figure, which John adopts for his theological configuration of Christ’s coming. The “rulers” were deceived and mistook the Cross for his failure. Against this Sophia speculation which rejects the event of the

¹⁶ This language of Paul, based on his opponent’s terminology, attracts such gnostic theologians as Valentinus, Basilides, Heracleon, and Ptolemaeus in the second and third centuries C.E. so that they read Paul’s letters gnostically. See Elaine H. Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975). Cf. Pearson, “Hellenistic-Jewish Wisdom Speculation,” 54-56.

¹⁷ The term, “depth” (βάθος or βυθός) is referred to as one of the original dyad of Valentinian Pleroma (AH 1.1.1; 1.8.4; 1.11.1).

¹⁸ In Philonic Judaism or Hellenistic Judaism, the diverse figures including Sophia came to be merged as God’s soteriological agents. See Burton L. Mack, “The Christ and Jewish Wisdom,” in *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 208; Charles H. Talbert, “The Myth of a Descending-Ascending Redeemer in Mediterranean Antiquity,” *NTS* 22 (1976): 418-39.

Cross, Paul reinterprets the Christ of Sophia in terms of his humiliation-exaltation:

For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom (Sophia) of God. (1:22-24)

He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom (Sophia) from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. (1:30)

Paul emphasizes that his message centers on Christ's crucifixion by which Jesus' humiliation is transformed into his glory. Thus in 1 Cor. 2:8, Paul refers to the crucified Christ as "the Lord of glory" which is applied to God in Jewish literature.¹⁹ By way of the crucifixion, Christ is exalted to be the source of life, wisdom, and salvation. The descent myth of Sophia is appropriated in this pattern. The so-called *Carmen Christi* (Phil. 2:6-11) is introduced by Paul so that he makes a theological case in interpreting Christ's descent as humiliation-exaltation.

The *Carmen Christi*: Pauline *Descensus* and *Ascensus*: Phil. 2:6-11

Some scholars came to see the ideas of Phil. 2:6-11 as originating from the Isaianic passage, especially the Deutero-Isaianic Servant Songs,²⁰ while others think of

¹⁹ Pearson, "Hellenistic-Jewish Wisdom Speculation," 46. This title is dominantly used in 1 Enoch.

²⁰ Ernst Lohmeyer, *Kyrios Jesus: Eine Untersuchung zu Phil. 2, 5-11*, 2nd ed. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1961); Joachim Jeremias, "Christological Interpretation of the Deutero-Isaiah Servant of God in the New Testament," in *The Servant of God*, trans. Harold Knight et al. (Naperville, IL: A. R. Allenson, 1957); David M. Stanley, "The Theme of the Servant of Yahweh in Primitive Christian Soteriology and Its Transposition by St. Paul," *CBQ* 16/4 (1954): 385-425; Eduard Schweizer, *Erniedrigung und Erhöhung bei Jesus und seinen Nachfolgern* (Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1955). For the summary of these scholars' views, see Jack T. Sanders, *The New Testament Christological Hymns*, 58-64; Ralph P. Martin, *Carmen Christi Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in*

the gnostic redeemer myth or Sophia myth behind the *Carmen Christi*.²¹ In the exegetical history of the hymn, the hymnic and mythical feature of Christ's cosmic descent and exaltation has been presented since Lohmeyer and Dibelius. Especially, the latter suggests that the hymn was a "Christian moralization of a *deus descensus* myth."²²

The myth of a *deus descensus* had been widely known to the ancient people of the Greco-Roman world. The idea that deities descend in human forms and walk among humans was not unfamiliar and not seen as a scandal to people. They do not even raise a question as to what kind of body gods or goddesses assume when the two natures of god and human are related. This *deus descensus* is seen in Acts 14:8-18 where Paul and Barnabas are considered as Hermes and Zeus respectively when the people of Lystra watch them healing the crippled and thereby say, "the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men."²³ Dionysus, in Euripides' *Bacchae*, as a hero and deity, claims that he comes to the land of the Thebans, "changed into mortal image." And he appears (δοκέω) to be persecuted and suffer but he is not destined to suffer because he is divine in

the Settings of Early Christian Worship (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 24-93.

²¹ Ernst Käsemann, "Kritische Analyse von Phil. 2.5-11," in *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen, Gesammelte Aufsätze*, 2nd ed., Bd. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1960), 51-95; Dieter Georgi, "Der vorpaulinische Hymnus Phil. 2.6-11," in *Zeit und Geschichte: Dankesgabe an Rudolf Bultmann zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. Erich Dinkler (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1964), 263-93, argues that the background of the hymn reflects the development from the Servant of Isaiah to the Righteous One in the *Wisdom of Solomon*, and that early Christianity identifies this Righteous One with Sophia, based on the "developing myth" as a synthesis in Hellenistic-Judaism.

²² James A. Sanders, "Dissenting Deities and Philippians 2.1-11," *JBL* 88 (1969): 279, citing Martin Dibelius, *An die Thessalonicher I, II, An die Philipper*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: J. C. Mohr, 1925), 72-82.

²³ Another example of a *deus descensus* is seen in Acts 28 where Paul at the island of Malta was bitten by a snake but was not hurt, so that others think and say, "he was a god."

nature.²⁴ A deity with many human forms (“polymorphic”) is regarded as natural in Greco-Roman culture. The best example of the docetic Jesus is represented in the polymorphic Jesus in the apocryphal Acts of Thomas, John, and Peter.²⁵ This kind of old docetic Christology seems to have come out of the immediate mythical context of the *deus descensus* myth in the Greco-Roman world.

If the mythical background behind Phil. 2:6-11 reflects a *deus descensus* myth, it would be “docetic” in that the hymn, reflecting a *deus descensus* myth, might originate in the church of Antioch where Paul and Barnabas begin their ministry. If Paul had an opportunity to learn earlier Christology, it could be docetic Christology which presupposes the pre-existent Christ and has a serious reservation about the Virgin birth. Early docetic Christology was vehemently rejected by Ignatius of Antioch in the early 2nd century C.E., when he writes to some churches in Asia Minor:²⁶

But if as some who are atheists- that is, unbelievers- say, that he suffered in appearance, whereas it is they who are (mere) appearance, why am I in bonds? I die, then, in vain! Then I lie about the Lord! (*Trallians* 10)

For he suffered all this for us that we might be saved; and he truly suffered just as he also truly raised himself, not as some unbelievers say that he suffered in appearance, whereas it is they who are (mere) appearance; and just as they think, so it will happen to them, being bodiless and demonic. (*Smyrnaeans* 2)

The opponents of Ignatius have a docetic Christological tendency in that they reject the real suffering and physical death of Christ. Before Ignatius, there had been much

²⁴ Riley, *One Jesus, Many Christs*, 125-28.

²⁵ Gregory J. Riley, “Thomas Tradition and the Acts of Thomas,” *SBL Seminar Papers* (1991): 533-42.

²⁶ Translation from William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985). In the *Letter to the Magnesians* 9.1-2, Ignatius also mentions that a certain group denies Jesus’ physical death but maintains that His descent to Hades raised the old prophets from death.

Christological bent of docetism in the early church, whether Hellenistic or Greek. In this regard, Paul could be borrowing this docetic hymn, which had been used in the liturgical setting in his home church, for his Christological proclamation. It appears that a high Christology of the hymn reflects such an early Christology in the first strophe (2:6-8b).

Sanders sees this first part of the hymn as a “Pauline accommodation of the original *deus descensus* theme to his own cross-centered Christology.”²⁷ He continues to say that the itinerary of ὁς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ has gone as far as it can go to take a human outward form which is under the power of death. In other words, the *deus descensus* goes as far as his descent to Hades (“the chthonian regions”).²⁸ Wengst classifies this hymn with the gnostic journey motif as the *Gattung* of *Weglied* (song of journey).²⁹ Sanders, interestingly, contrasts Christ’s *descensus* with other *dei descensi* such as Azazel, Semihazah, Lucifer, Satan, Gadreel, and so on.³⁰ The motivations of the *descensus* are different. While Christ’s descent is motivated by the value of ταπεινοφροσύνη as he descends by emptying (ἐκένωσεν) and humbling (ἐταπείνωσεν) himself, other angelic rebellious descents are motivated by such ideas as ἐριθεία (self-ambition), κενοδοξία (self-deception), and ἀρπαγμός (something to grasp after), indicated in Phil. 2:3 and 6.³¹ It seems that the term ἀρπαγμός in 2:6 reflects the fall of Sophia whose passion or desire to grasp after the Father or *Bythus* (depth) makes her fall from

²⁷ Sanders, “Dissenting Deities,” 282.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Klaus Wengst, *Christologische Formeln und Lieder des Urchristentums*, 2nd ed. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1974), 144-65.

³⁰ Such angelic rebellious descents are seen in Gen. 6, Isa. 14, Ezek. 28, *1 Enoch*, 2 *Enoch*, and *Vita Adae et Evae*.

³¹ Sanders argues for the mythical rebellious angels from these terms, demonstrated in *1 Enoch* and *Vita Adam* traditions

the Pleroma.³²

The second strophe (2:9-11) in the *Carmen Christi* shows the end of the mythic drama through the exaltation and enthronement of the *deus descensus*. What is distinctive from other *apotheosis* of the heroes is that Christ's exaltation emphasizes his enthronement as the cosmic ruler:

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:9-11)

The latter part of the hymn as enthronement or *apotheosis* does not seem to necessarily presuppose Jesus' resurrection. Rather, the original hymn prior to Paul's appropriation shows a hint of the *apotheosis* of the cultic hero in the Greco-Roman world. Paul, however, furthers and advances this cultic divinization in terms of the cosmic level so that the heavenly enthronement of Christ includes cosmic lordship.³³ Käsemann considers this kind of Christ's exaltation as his being *Kosmokrator* as well as *Pantokrator* (Almighty) to whom all powers and authorities become subject.³⁴ Interestingly, Ignatius mentions in his letters that the *Descensus Christi* is already the cosmic drama in which Christ as a brighter star than all other stars (angelic beings) disturbs all spiritual powers including death (*Ephesians* 19:1-3) and that Christ's crucifixion is the cosmic event which "heavenly, earthly, and sub-earthly things looked on" (*Trallians* 9.1).

The heavenly enthronement of Christ in the cosmic level of this mythic drama is

³² Irenaeus, *AH* 1.2.2-4.

³³ Käsemann, "Kritische Analyse," 84-85, argues for this point, beyond Bousset's thesis in his book, *Kyrios Christos* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), that *Christus Kyrios* became a cultic hero in the Christian cultic community, analogous to the Hellenistic cultic heroes.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

realized through Christ's humiliating descent to the point of his real physical suffering and death. Paul's appropriation of a *deus descensus*, whose docetic Christology was used as a hymn prior to Paul, is made in his emphasis on Christ's humiliation and exaltation. The cosmic drama of the descent-ascent is pastorally and theologically explained when Paul stresses the lordship of Christ over all creation. This cosmic recognition of Christ is contrasted with other spiritual beings in terms of Paul's cosmology and worldview.

Christ's Cosmic Lordship in Pauline Texts:

Pauline Cosmic View and Subjugation of Evil Powers

Paul used and appropriated the Sophia speculation and a *deus descensus* in a Christological framework of humiliation-exaltation. In a conclusive point of those passages, he asserts that Christ is exalted as the Lord of the cosmos, by saying that Jesus is the "Sophia of God" (1 Cor. 1:24, 30), the "Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8), and "Lord" (Phil. 2:11). Paul's Christological speculation on Christ's lordship reflects his Jewish apocalyptic worldview and Hellenistic cosmology, under the influence of Zoroastrian cosmic dualism.³⁵ There are three aspects of Paul's cosmology in relation to Christ's exaltation or *ascensus*.

First, Paul seems to know the old Jewish Watcher myth reflected in Gen. 6 and *1 Enoch* 1-36. The idea of an adversary of human beings who works somehow with

³⁵ Riley, *One Jesus, Many Christs*, 95. For the Persian apocalyptic eschatology, see John J. Collins, "The Persian Apocalypse," *Semeia* 14 (1979): 207-17; *idem*, "Cosmos and Salvation: Jewish Wisdom and Apocalyptic in the Hellenistic Age," *HR* 17 (1977): 121-42.

God's permission, obviously enough in Job, becomes less conceivable when the adversary becomes a rebel against God. In the apocalyptic movement, the cosmic dualism makes the distinction between God and his adversary more radical, which is clearly influenced by Zoroastrian co-existent twin gods, Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu.³⁶ More important in later New Testament eschatology, the Watcher myth from Enochic material came to stand behind Jewish apocalyptic eschatology in the diverse New Testament texts. In the course of time, the ambiguous figure of Satan in the courts of El becomes an independent evil power in the apocalyptic movement of the Second Temple period under the influence of the cosmological dualism of Persian Zoroastrianism, which is seen in Jewish intertestamental literature. This cosmological dualism tends to ascribe the origin of all evils to the Devil or a variety of names, while Second Isaiah rejects such dualistic idea by saying that "God created light and darkness" (45:7).³⁷ As the intervention of such an intermediary figure is thought to be the problem of evil, Paul and Hellenistic Jewish people think that the cosmic level of human adversaries is present in the Greco-Roman world and they function as enemies to the Cross of Christ.

As the old Watcher myth explains that the corruption of the world and humanity was caused by the lust of rebellious angels, and the continuing evils until the end of time are incited by the spirits of the disembodied giants in *1 Enoch* (6-16),³⁸ the mythical

³⁶ Segal, *Life after Death*, 178-80.

³⁷ Riley, *River of God*, 73.

³⁸ Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, 160-68; Paul D. Hanson, "Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6-11," *JBL* 96/2 (1977): 195-233. As I read the Bible and the secondly literature on the Watcher myth and construct it, I think that the Watcher myth comprises four stages; the appointment of angels by God as "angels or stars of nations" (Dan. 4:13; Deut. 32:8; Ps. 82:1-7), the rebellion of angels or stars (Gen. 6:1-5; *1 Enoch* 6-16; Isa. 14; Ezek. 28), the war between good angels and bad ones (Dan. 10:13, 20-21, 11:1; Jude 1:9), and the final judgment against Satan and evil angels (Mt 25:41; 2 Pet. 2:3-5; Jude 1:4-6; Rev. 12:3-9).

explanation of the world's corruption and the apocalyptic fate of those angels' imprisonment are reflected in the New Testament as the eschatological fate of Satan and his minions (Mt 25:41, Jude 4-6, 2 Pet. 2:3-5, and Rev. 12:3-9). Thus Paul describes angels as negative beings in his letters. He thinks that angels disturbed the heavenly order (Rom. 8:38), deceived Eve (2 Cor. 11:3, 14), gave the temporary and burdensome Law to humanity (Gal. 3:19), and caused women to wear head covers because of angelic lust for women by the Watchers. Paul asserts that Christians are to "judge angels" in the end of time (1 Cor. 6:3). The Devil as the ruler of this age is expressed as "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4) and "Beliar" (2 Cor. 6:15).³⁹ Paul also demonizes physical suffering, to the extent that he recommends a certain man of scandal to be "handed over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh" (1 Cor. 5:5).

Second, a distinctive idea demonstrating Paul's Hellenistic cosmology is his use of the term στοιχεῖα in Galatians 4:3, and 9. Paul argues in this letter that humanity is in a kind of slavery under (ὑπο) the law (3:23), a disciplinarian (3:25), guardians and trustees (4:2), and the "elemental spirits" (στοιχεῖα, 4:3). Before Paul uses the term στοιχεῖα, the apocalyptic dimension has been implicitly emphasized when he makes a contrast between "law" and "faith." The motif of slavery culminates in the human condition under the στοιχεῖα of the cosmos. Even though the meaning of this term has been much debated among commentators and has been changed in the course of time,⁴⁰

³⁹ For the detailed development of the idea of Satan or Devil, see Gregory J. Riley, "Devil," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toorn et al., 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 244-49.

⁴⁰ For the broad meaning of στοιχεῖον, see Gerhard Delling, "στοιχεῖον" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 670-87. For the four major possibilities of its meaning, see *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed.

for Paul, the term itself seems to reveal his apocalyptic thrust and Hellenistic worldview regarding the “present evil age” (1:4). It appears that the most possible meaning of στοιχεῖα for Paul’s use is the “elemental spirits” (angelic beings) as “demonic entities of cosmic proportions and astral powers which are hostile towards man.”⁴¹ The term represents the evil astral powers who are located in the seven concentric heavens to control human fate (τύχη) and watch the ascending souls as gatekeepers. This might be related with the rise of fatalistic astrology in the Greco-Roman world of the first century C.E.⁴² The term could be interchangeably used with “rulers” (ἄρχων) of this age” (1 Cor. 2:6).

Third, the universal lordship of Christ is expressed distinctively in a three-story universe (Phil. 2:10) or a two-story cosmos (Col. 1:16, 20; 3:2; Phil. 2:1). Whether Paul has both cosmologies in his worldview, he expresses Christ’s heavenly enthronement or exaltation as a way of subjugating the spiritual powers. Phil. 2:9-11 refers to the universal lordship of Jesus Christ in three cosmic areas; heavenly (ἐπουράνιος), earthly

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 768-69. For the summary of scholarly discussion, see J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 393-95.

⁴¹ Hans D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 204-5, argues that this term represents the Greco-Roman and Jewish syncretism of the time of Paul. Cf. Clinton E. Arnold, “Returning to the Domain of the Powers: Stoicheia as Evil Spirits in Galatians 4:3, 9,” *NovT* 38 (1996): 55-76, rejects Delling’s argument that the possibility of interpreting στοιχεῖα as the “elemental spirits” which influence the celestial bodies and human beings is easily dismissed because of the allegedly late date of the sources, by demonstrating several early uses of this term as meaning “evil spirits, angels, and powers” prior to Paul; Wesley Carr, *Angels and Principalities: The Background, Meaning and Development of the Pauline Phrase “hai archai kai hai exousiai”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 73, argues that, in spite of the late evidence of the term related with the heavenly bodies, the early idea of angels or star spirits in connection with the term στοιχεῖα developed subsequently to the time of Paul.

⁴² Carr, *Angels and Principalities*, 15-18.

(ἐπίγειος), and subterranean (καταχθόνιος):⁴³

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Though Carr does not accept Dibelius' argument that all three adjectives referring to the three areas demonstrate Christ's subjugating the evil powers, this passage seems to clearly indicate the cosmic recognition of Christ's lordship over every part of creation.⁴⁴

The much clearer implication of Christ's subjugation of the heavenly evil powers is expressed in another so-called Christ hymn of the letter to the Colossians.⁴⁵ This hymn explicitly demonstrates that Christ is the *Pantokrator*:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones (θρόνοι) or dominions (κυριότητες) or rulers (ἀρχαί) or powers (ἐξουσίαι) -- all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness (*pleroma*) of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Col. 1:15-20)

⁴³ There is a gender issue of whether three adjectives are masculine or neuter. If those are interpreted as masculine, those refer to spiritual powers, while, in the case of being neutral, they indicate more or less cosmic spaces

⁴⁴ Carr, 86-89, argues that the idea of Christ over angel powers is a post-Pauline development so that the submission of cosmic evil powers is not implicit in it. But Carr's argument is not convincing to me because Paul has already a concept of cosmic evil power such as στοιχεῖα. Cf. Martin Dibelius, *Die Geisterwelt im Glauben des Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1909), 231.

⁴⁵ This letter is now not considered as an undisputed authentic Pauline letter. But it has the most possibility of "Pauline" among the deutero-Pauline letters. Dibelius, Kümmel, Lightfoot, and Carr support Pauline authorship of the Colossians.

While Dibelius sees a cosmic redeemer in terms of cosmic speculation,⁴⁶ Käsemann identifies Christ with the gnostic redeemer in whom the primal Man and Sophia-Logos speculation are bound up together.⁴⁷ The cosmic recognition of Christ's lordship is asserted in that Christ is the image (εἰκών) of God, the firstborn (πρωτότοκος) of all creation, and all the fullness (πλήρωμα). Especially, Käsemann notes that this pre-Christian hymn has "gnostic terminology."⁴⁸ This hymn appears to presuppose the gnostic redeemer through whom God "liberates the elect from the power of darkness" (Col. 1:13).

The "power of darkness" appears to be demonstrated by way of a two-story universe in Col. 1:16 (things in heaven and earth, or visible and invisible). More spiritually, it is designated as "thrones, dominions, rulers or authorities." Although Carr argues that those spiritual beings must not be considered as "hostile" but as "angelic hosts" who witness the majesty of Christ as Lord,⁴⁹ it appears that the cosmic lordship of Christ includes his subjugation of the power of darkness (1:13) and all angelic evil powers (1:16), and his reconciliation of all things to him who is all *Pleroma* (1:19-20; 2:9-10). Christ's subjugation is clearly indicated in 2:15 where again the "rulers" and "authorities" are the spiritual beings who came to be disarmed by Christ's exaltation through the event of the Cross:

[Christ] erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a

⁴⁶ Martin Dibelius, *An die Kolosser, Epheser: An Philemon*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1927), 14.

⁴⁷ Ernst Käsemann, "A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy," in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. W. J. Montague (Naperville, IL: A. R. Allenson, 1964), 154-59.

⁴⁸ Käsemann, "Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy," 154.

⁴⁹ Carr, *Angels and Principalities*, 52.

public example of them, triumphing over them in it. (2:14-15)

Christ's subjugation is realized in his heavenly enthronement or *ascensus*, as shown in Phil. 2:9-11 which demonstrates that the universal subjection of the three-story universe is made to the exalted Christ, in Heb. 1:6ff, which indicates that the angels came to worship the enthroned Christ, and in 1 Tim. 3:16, which shows that the glorified Christ is "seen by angels." The cosmic recognition of Christ's glorification by angels appears in such terms as δειγματίζω ("expose") and θριαμβεύω ("triumph over"). Carr argues that the metaphor of the latter term demonstrates the essentially Roman concept of a triumph in which the Roman *triumphator* celebrates the victory by driving and exposing the defeated enemies before him with the most honored guests in the triumphal procession.⁵⁰

The above discussion concludes that Paul's idea of Christ's subjugating the heavenly evil powers is based on his negative view of angels due to the angelic rebellion myth, as well as on the Hellenistic cosmology in which the heavenly evil powers still work on human souls and fates. Paul seems to have had little idea of Christ's *descensus ad inferos* to subjugate the power of Hades or evil spirits. Rather for him, this subjugation is realized in Christ's heavenly enthronement in his *ascensus*. Although Paul has a traditional three-story cosmology to some extent, his cosmology might reflect much more a geocentric cosmology when he recounts that he had an experience of the cosmic tour in which he finds paradise in the third heaven among the seven heavens, as in 2 Enoch 42 and 3 Baruch 4.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Carr, *Angels and Principalities*, 61-64. Explicitly, 2 Cor. 2:14 tells us that God is always the *triumphator* who θριαμβεύοντι ἡμᾶς ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ.

⁵¹ For the description of these cosmic tours, see Richard Bauckham, "Early Jewish Visions of Hell," in his book, *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian*

Paul expects his soul to be with the Lord in a heavenly home (2 Cor. 5:8) as he sees his approach to death. The later stage of Paul's life finds him acting and thinking more like a Greek philosopher's soul, like Socrates who prepares and practices his personal death.⁵² Paul simply thinks of the journey of the soul like a Greek philosopher or Cicero:

But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. (Phil. 3:20-21)

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling. (2 Cor 5:1-2)

Paul's eschatology has no Christ and His soul in Hades but only the heavenly exalted Christ and his expected journey of the soul bound for heaven. If there is an idea of Christ's descent, it is Christ's humiliation on the Cross of which the rulers of this age are ignorant. The subjugation of the evil powers in heaven is realized in Christ's *ascensus*.

Apocalypse (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 49-96.

⁵² Plato, *Phaedo* 64a, "those who pursue philosophy aright study nothing but dying and being dead." Plato's Socrates calls this μελέτη θανάτου ("the practice of death," *Phaedo* 67e, 81a). See, David E. Aune, "Human Nature and Ethics in Hellenistic Philosophical Traditions and Paul: Some Issues and Problems," in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 305-12. This tradition could be called "personal eschatology," compared with Hesiodic epochal eschatology (Hesiod, *Works and Days* 175) or Persian apocalyptic eschatology. Cf. Riley, *One Jesus, Many Christs*, 31-36.

Christ's Ever-presence through His *Descensus* and *Ascensus*: Rom. 10:6-8

Another Pauline passage related to Christ's descent is Rom. 10:6-8. This could be a reference to a Pauline tradition that is aware of the *descensus* tradition. This passage alludes to Deut. 30:12-13, which uses two rhetorical questions merely to express the impossible.⁵³ Robinson argues that this passage demonstrates the rephrasing of the kerygmatic proclamation of Christ's incarnation and resurrection, by using Ps. 71 to interpret the Deuteronomic passage.⁵⁴ When Paul refers to Christ's resurrection from the dead, he uses the rhetorical question, "who will descend into the abyss (ἄβυσσος)?" Even though he alludes to the Deuteronomic passage, he modifies the statement dealing with the descent, by changing "into the depth of the sea" (Deut. 30:13) to "into the abyss." The term "abyss" is used in Ps. 71:20 (LXX) to indicate the underworld, as well as in Lk 8:31 and Rev. 9:1.⁵⁵ The Pauline answer to the impossible ascent and descent of any human being except for Christ's *descensus* and *ascensus* emphasizes Christ's lordship toward which Paul directs his rhetoric: "because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved..." (Rom. 10:9-13).

Harris argues that Paul's borrowing of Deut. 30:12-3 depends on the Palestinian Targum rather than the MT or the LXX:

The law is not in the heavens, that thou should say, O that we had one like Mosheh the prophet to ascend into heaven, and bring it to us, and make us hear its commands, that we may do them! Neither is the law beyond the great sea, that thou should say,

⁵³ James M. Robinson, "Descent into Hades," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick et al., vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 826.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ This term is a Greek translation of the Hebrew term, תְּהוֹמוֹת

O that we had one like Jonah the prophet, who could descend into the depth of the sea, and bring it to us, and make us hear its commands, that we may do them. For the word is very nigh you, in your mouth... (Tg. Deut. 30:12-13)⁵⁶

If this targumic tradition was known to Paul, it was conceivable that Paul rejected Moses' ascent into heaven⁵⁷ and Jonah's descent into Hades, even though Rom. 10:6-8 does not name them. The passage stresses the fact that Christ already descended (incarnated) and ascended (resurrected) to become "Lord of all" (10:12).

Paul seems to know the early Jewish tradition about the ascent and descent traditions. He, however, denies any human connection to those traditions because those epochal events were only realized in Christ's *descensus* and *ascensus*. The point that Paul makes in Rom. 10:6-10 is that Christ has already become the Lord so that he has been ever-present in the heart of the believers who confess that "Jesus is Lord" (10:9). No other descent or ascent tradition is needed to get another revelation for salvation.

In conclusion, Paul recognizes several traditions related with the *descensus* traditions such as the Sophia, the Watchers, and early Jewish apocalyptic literature. While he is aware of those traditions, he rejects such traditions by Christological appropriations and adaptations. He uses them in terms of Christ's humiliation and exaltation. Furthermore, he emphasizes the cosmic and universal lordship of Christ on the occasion of Christ's *ascensus*. While he rejects any other human descent and ascent, Christ's descent and ascent has been realized so that his lordship is already present in the

⁵⁶ W. Hall Harris III, *The Descent of Christ: Ephesians 4:7-11 and Traditional Hebrew Imagery* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 57, citing the text of Tg. Deut. 30:12-13 from John W. Etheridge, *The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch* (New York: Ktav., 1968), 654-55.

⁵⁷ For Moses' cosmic tour, see Bauckham, *Fate of the Dead*, 60-66.

faith community. Christ's descent into Hades is not explicitly seen in Paul. Christ's descent is interpreted as his humiliation on the Cross. Yet Christ's cosmic lordship includes the descent to the point of death and his overpowering it until he finally disarms all heavenly evil powers in his ascent. Paul's cosmology makes his Christology directed toward Christ's heavenly enthronement rather than the subterranean harrowing of Hades.

Paul and John appear to share some gnostic language and conceptual world of Gnosticism.⁵⁸ In comparison to Paul, however, John develops Christ's descent in a more gnostic way when he sees the material world as "dark" and "evil."

⁵⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 9, argues that both Paul and John find themselves in debate with adherents of Gnosticism, though they were also influenced by gnostic language and the redeemer myth.

CHAPTER 5

The Gnostic Disguised Descent of the Son of Man:

The Gospel of John

John 1 ends up with introducing a Christological title of the Son of Man, after heaping up such titles as Messiah, Elijah, and the Prophet for Jesus by way of John the Baptist's negating them to be entitled to himself, who also introduces Jesus as "Lamb of God." Bultmann notices that the isolated saying in 1:51 makes the Evangelist's list of Christological titles more complete.¹ The first appearance of the title, "Son of Man," in John contains a reference to ascending and descending. When John makes his Christological titles complete in reference to the Son of Man, the mythical language of the descending-ascending seems to be adopted in this general introduction to the issue with which the Gospel is going to deal, i.e., the identity and origin of Jesus, on the lips of Jesus.

As Wayne Meeks criticizes, Bultmann's hypothesis that the typical gnostic myth was deliberately modified by the Evangelist, demythologizing it, tends to reduce the function of myth in John to theological categories.² If the myth of the gnostic redeemer has been adopted and demythologized in a way which John described the strangeness of Jesus in the world, it seems to me that the Johannine

¹ Bultmann, *Gospel of John*, 107.

² Wayne A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972), 47. Bultmann's hypothesis has been criticized by the fact that his gnostic myth was dependent on the investigation of the late Mandaean materials and was too simplified in spite of the variety of actual gnostic myths.

community has its own myth to make sense to their sectarian religious life.³ It appears that this mythical language of descending and ascending combined with the title of the Son of Man is seen in 1:51, 3:13, and 6:62. If this combination between the myth and the Christological title has a specific Johannine theological thrust, then its metaphor or connotation is likely to be contextualized and conceptualized in the Johannine community life.

Another perspective on John's mythic language of distinctive Christology is to see the Christ of the descent-ascent as the founding figure in keeping with the genre of "wisdom personification." As it is noted, in the Hellenistic age, wisdom mythologies have been appropriated and used in wisdom literature and among the Hellenistic Jews.⁴ The motif of wisdom's descent-ascent might be used as the background of Christ's descent into the world.

As Bultmann emphasizes it, the language of myth has a special logic,⁵ which will be also my assumption for the following investigation of the Johannine use of the *descensus* tradition and its combination between the mythical language and the title of the Son of Man.

³ Ibid. Meeks mentions that the Bultmann and Jonas theory of myth as the objectification of the religious person's sense of his or her relationship to self and world was a significant step towards a more appropriate hermeneutic for mythical language.

⁴ See the popular Jewish "wisdom tale," documented in George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

⁵ Meeks, 44, citing Rudolf Bultmann, "Die Bedeutung der neuerschlossenen mandäischen und manichäischen Quellen für das Verständnis des Johannesevangeliums," *ZNW* 24 (1925): 100-46.

Wisdom Mythology as the Religious Milieu for John?

The Hellenistic-Jewish mythology of a descending-ascending redeemer is usually overlooked when T. Fawcett says that pre-Christian Judaism did not have any one myth that would account for the primitive Christian concept of Jesus' descent from heaven.⁶ The existence of a descent-ascent pattern in Jewish mythology, however, used for redemption figures in ancient Judaism could be found in the wisdom speculation which speaks of the descent of wisdom (Sophia, Hochma) from heaven with saving intent. Sanders assumes that all New Testament early Christological hymns are based on the same myth of the redeemer as their historical religious background.⁷ According to him, the trajectory of this myth originated from the Jewish wisdom schools before the Common Era. Rather than one basic original gnostic redeemer myth,⁸ he follows the model of "developing myth" of Sophia, proposed by D. Georgi, which is based on the progressive hypostatization concept of wisdom.⁹ For him, this redeemer myth involves "his participation in creation, his descent and ascent to and from the world, and his work

⁶ Thomas Fawcett, *Hebrew Myth and Christian Gospel* (London: SCM Press, 1973), 158.

⁷ Jack T. Sanders, *The New Testament Christological Hymns: Their Historical Religious Background* (Cambridge: University Press, 1971), 24. The general consensus among scholars on NT Christological hymns is that Phil. 2:6-11; 1 Tim. 3:16; Col. 1:15-20; Eph. 2:14-16; Heb. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:20; 3:18, 22 and the Prologue of John represent such early hymns. See Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, "Wisdom Mythology and the Christological Hymns of the New Testament," in *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Robert L. Wilken (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 19-20.

⁸ The major proponents of this model are Bultmann, Wilckens, and Käsemann.

⁹ Fiorenza, "Wisdom Mythology," reviews the developing myth of wisdom seen in the *Wisdom of Solomon*, suggested in Dieter Georgi's "Der vorpaulinische Hymnus Phil. 2:6-11," in *Zeit und Geschichte, Dankesgabe an Rudolf Bultmann zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. E. Dinkler (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1964), 263-93.

of redemption.”¹⁰ As the wisdom myth is seen as “already begun and developed” in the Jewish-Hellenistic wisdom speculation, the idea of the descent of wisdom could be accepted for diverse Christological speculations in the New Testament.

The descent wisdom myth presupposes the pre-existent divine wisdom with God. The relocation of wisdom as “personified”¹¹ for descending has taken place during the Hellenistic period so that the location of wisdom beyond the created order and its relocation into the world serve for God’s concern with creation and world order.¹² Sirach 24 shows that the pre-existent wisdom from heaven appears on the earth and dwells in Jacob and Jerusalem as the Torah, whereas *1 Enoch* 42:1-2 relates that the personified Wisdom from heaven seeks to find a dwelling place but should return to heaven and takes her seat among the angels because she cannot find her place on the earth.

Among all these I sought a resting place; in whose territory should I abide? Then the Creator of all things gave me a command, and my Creator chose the place for my tent. He said, “Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance.” Before the ages, in the beginning, he created me, and for all the ages I shall not cease to be. In the holy tent I ministered before him, and so I was

¹⁰ Sanders, “Christological Hymns,” 24-28, maintains that the eight elements of the Christological hymns may be represented schematically as follows: 1. The redeemer possesses unity or equality with God; 2. The redeemer is mediator or agent of creation; 3. The redeemer is himself a part of creation; 4. The redeemer descends from the heavenly to the earthly realm; 5. He dies; 6. He is made alive again; 7. He effects a reconciliation; 8. He is exalted and enthroned and the cosmic powers become subject to him.

¹¹ Proverbs 1:20-22 shows the poetic personification, while ch. 8 demonstrates the pre-existence of Wisdom that was created at the beginning of God’s work. Later in Hellenistic Judaism, a hypostatization of the divine Wisdom seems to take place, as in *1 Enoch* and the *Wisdom of Solomon*.

¹² Burton L. Mack, “The Christ and Jewish Wisdom,” in *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 194-95; *idem*, “Wisdom Myth and Mythology,” *Interpretation* 24 (1970): 46-60.

established in Zion. (Sirach 24:7-10)¹³

Wisdom could not find a place in which she could dwell; but a place was found for her in the heavens. Then Wisdom went out to dwell with the children of the people but she found no dwelling place and she settled permanently among angels. (1 *Enoch* 42:1-2)¹⁴

In the *Wisdom of Solomon*, the descending of pre-existent Wisdom from heaven plays her saving role both for the world and the people who seek for her (7:24-27; 8:10). The motif of wisdom's descent related to the wisdom myth is the imagery of King Solomon in need of wisdom and with the story of the deliverance of wisdom's righteous people. Solomon prays that God will send wisdom forth from the throne of glory so that she may be with him (9:10).

With you is wisdom, she who knows your works and was present when you made the world; she understands what is pleasing in your sight and what is right according to your commandments. Send her forth from the holy heavens, and from the throne of your glory send her, that she may labor at my side, and that I may learn what is pleasing to you. For she knows and understands all things, and she will guide me wisely in my actions and guard me with her glory. (Wisdom 9:9-11)

In chapter 10, the series of deliverance of people in history by wisdom was drawn in terms of her soteriological descent. Besides this *Heilsgeschichte* by wisdom's descent, the author emphasizes wisdom's role for immortality in the next world (6:18-20; 8:13, 17).¹⁵ The wisdom myth by the personification or hypostatization of the pre-existent Wisdom, who descends and acts as a historical entity among people (Israel), has developed when later Jewish literature comes to see the personified Wisdom as a

¹³ See also Baruch 3:27-4:4.

¹⁴ For the present hiddenness and inaccessibility of wisdom for humanity, see Job 28:13.

¹⁵ As with ben Sirach's seeing the personified Wisdom as the Torah, the *Wisdom of Solomon* finds the personification of wisdom in keeping the law. Furthermore, it is said that the observance of the law leads into immortality (6:18).

heavenly redeemer figure around the beginning of the Common Era.¹⁶ In addition to the descent of wisdom, 2 Esdras 5:9-10 and 2 *Baruch* 48:36 refer to the ascent of wisdom, departing the earth during the crisis before the end. Certainly it is the case that the wisdom myth as a personified saving act of God in the world existed in pre-Christian Hellenistic Judaism and alongside first- and second-century Christianity.¹⁷

The wisdom myth or the Logos concept of Hellenistic Judaism, however, has little thing to do with the Johannine' descent and ascent because the latter includes his Crucifixion and resurrection. Another problem to be noted is that one definite origin for the antecedents of the Johannine Logos has not yet been successfully defined, in that the Sophia myth has gone through syncretism in the Hellenistic period with mixing motifs, though a coherent, or one basic myth of Wisdom that is hypostatized and personified has been argued for.¹⁸ What really renders the wisdom myth inadequate as the source of the

¹⁶ Charles H. Talbert, "The Myth of a Descending-Ascending Redeemer in Mediterranean Antiquity," *NTS* 22 (1976): 422.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 430. Mack points out that few studies have engaged the question of wisdom thought and Christology in broad perspective and none has succeeded in displacing the scholarly consensus on the apocalyptic messianic background of the Jesus movement. See his categorical notes on the scholarly studies of the connections between wisdom thought and the aspects of a high Christology: (1) the notion of preexistence; (2) the humiliation-exaltation in kerygmatic and hymnic formulations; (3) the logosproem in John; (4) the "Sophia-Christology" in Q and Matthew; and (5) the esoteric content of Christian gnosis.

¹⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1941), 9 n. 8. For syncretistic forms of wisdom myth combined with many wisdom deities, see Hans Conzelmann, "The Mother of Wisdom," in *The Future of Our Religious Past*, ed. James M. Robinson, trans. Charles E. Carlston and Robert P. Scharlemann (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 230-43. For the existence of the common wisdom myth, see Ulrich Wilckens, "σοφία" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 507-9; *idem*, *Weisheit und Torheit: Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu 1. Kor. 1 und 2* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1959), 160-96, and Rudolf Bultmann, "Der religionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund des Prologs zum Johannes-Evangelium," in *Eucharisterion: Studien zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments. Hermann Gunkel zum 66. Geburtstag, dem 23. Mai 1922 dargebracht von seinen Schülern und Freunden*, ed. Hans

Johannine descent /ascent motif is that the term “wisdom” never occurs in John, though scholars tend to treat “wisdom” and “Logos” interchangeably.¹⁹ If the hiddenness of wisdom and its rejection by humanity describe her futile descent and the resultant return to heaven (Job 28:13; *1 Enoch* 42:1-3), this model of the wisdom myth does not fit well into the literary framework of John.

Such theological motifs as people’s continuing incomprehension of Jesus’ identity, the power of darkness in the world, and the destined time of Jesus reveal a more secret identity of the revealer, from the perspectives of Persian cosmic dualism between good and evil and the gnostic dualism between spiritual and material. Furthermore, the idea of the future apocalyptic Son of Man in the Synoptic tradition is not a main theological category for John’s using this title.²⁰ As a more adequate theological category for understanding John’s conceptualization of the *descensus* tradition, one should take into account the gnostic descent motif in which Christ’s coming into the world means something hidden and deceptive for non-believers and the power of darkness.

Schmidt, vol. 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1923), 1-26.

¹⁹ Delbert Burkett, *The Son of the Man in the Gospel of John* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 33, citing C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 275, who points out that the wisdom literature is inadequate to explicate such a statement as John 1:1, “the Word was God.”

²⁰ Francis J. Moloney, *The Johannine Son of Man*, 2nd ed. (Roma: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1978), 9, notes that Joachim Jeremias denies the influence of the gnostic Son of Man on the Johannine Son of Man, citing his article, “Die älteste Schicht der Menschensohnlogien,” *ZNW* 58 (1967), 163-64, 170-71. Moloney argues that the oldest original saying of the Son of Man was derived from Dan. 7:13 and that the Johannine usage developed directly from the traditional idea of the apocalyptic Son Man. But Burkett, 38-45, argues for a non-apocalyptic figure of the Johannine Son of Man in its origin in that the title, “the Son of the Man” has nothing to do with the pre-Christian apocalyptic tradition.

The Descent Motif in the Gnostic Literature

Gnosticizing the *Descensus* Tradition: Descent into the World (lower regions)

Rudolf Bultmann sees that the world of the New Testament literature was translated from the terminology of the Hellenistic world.²¹ Through a syncretistic process, under gnostic influence, the language of gnostic cosmology and anthropology came to exist within Christianity, even though there were many polemics against gnosticizing Christian traditions. Gnostic mythology emphasizes the fall of creation in which Satan as “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4), “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11), and “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2) rules the world and human beings. This mythology also serves to characterize the human situation of life as “darkness.” For Gnostics, the world itself is like hell or Hades where humans are enslaved to demonic powers. From the perspective of the gnostic conceptualization of the history of salvation, Bultmann adds that the gnostic myth of the descent and ascent of the redeemer is demonstrated in the cosmic figure of Christ who “descended into the lower parts of the earth” (Eph. 4:8-10).²² He interprets this passage as “the pre-existent Son’s journey to earth,” but not to Hades.

The anti-gnostic understanding of John’s Gospel has been inherited by Bultmann

²¹ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951), 164-83, argues how broadly and deeply the gnostic motifs in the Hellenistic world of the New Testament are reflected within the language of the early Christian churches.

²² *Ibid.*, 175.

who argued for a pre-Christian gnostic myth underlying the Fourth Gospel, but thought that the Gospel's origin, purpose, and character are "anti-gnostic."²³ In spite of this conclusion, Bultmann's basic assumption that John demythologized, christianized, and historicized a gnostic myth seems to take John as "quasi-gnostic"²⁴ because the seemingly gnostic ideas and language are embedded in the Evangelist's worldview and Christology,²⁵ which might later precipitate the Valentinian dependence on John's Gospel in their exegetical exercise used for their myth-making system.²⁶

The polemical point which John makes against a certain group is likely to be "anti-docetic," while both John and his opponent share the gnostic dualistic worldview and some gnostic theological thrusts.²⁷ The reason for this is that the primary theological orientation is a "Christological" debate rather than "anti-Jewish" in its latest redaction.²⁸ Richter calls the latest redactor of John the "anti-docetic redactor,"²⁹ while

²³ Alastair H. B. Logan, "John and the Gnostics: The Significance of the Apocryphon of John for the Debate about the Origins of the Johannine Literature," *JSNT* 43 (1991): 46.

²⁴ Robert Allan Hill, *An Examination and Critique of the Understanding of the Relationship between Apocalypticism and Gnosticism in Johannine Studies* (Lewiston: Mellen University Press, 1997), 41, argues that the anti-gnostic feature of John does not always mean John as non-gnostic. What it means by "quasi-gnostic" is that John does owe his Christological description and world to the pre-Christian Gnosticism in spite of his polemics against Gnosticism.

²⁵ For the general relationship of John to Gnosticism, see Bultmann, *Gospel of John*, 7-9.

²⁶ Elaine H. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979), 143-69.

²⁷ Udo Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John: An Investigation of the Place of the Fourth Gospel in the Johannine School*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 1-36, reviews the anti-docetical redactional layer in John, discussed by such scholars as W. Langbrandtner, H. Thyen, and G. Richter.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 31-36.

²⁹ Georg Richter, *Studien zum Johannesevangelium* (Rosenburg: Pustet, 1977), 357-58, 409-10.

Bultmann calls him an “ecclesiastical redactor.”³⁰ The oldest layer of John is seen as a “Jewish Christian document” of which the Christology generally corresponds to that of the later Ebionites.³¹ Against this low Christology, seeing Jesus as the “son of Joseph (1:45; 6:42), a new high Christology, seemingly gnostic, shared by John and a docetic group, appears as a response to this Jewish Christian Christology. It is likely that the latest layer by the anti-docetic redaction in John has a certain relation to the author of 1 and 2 John in its emphasis on Jesus’ assuming real flesh (John 1:14-18; 19:34-35; 1 John 4:2-3; 5:6; 2 John 7). While the polemical point in John in the latest layer of redaction between John and the docetic group is Christological (docetic vs. anti-docetic or incarnational), yet they share Jesus’ descent as “gnostic.”

Since the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices, the descent myth of the gnostic redeemer as a pre-Christian gnostic myth, which was proposed by Bultmann, has been more plausibly accepted as a religious historical background to the motif of descent and ascent in John.³² As Meeks notes, the myths of descending and ascending redeemers flourished around the first century C.E.³³ It is notable that he excludes more

³⁰ See the ecclesiastical redaction of John 5:19-30 in Bultmann, *Gospel of John*, 247-62.

³¹ Richter, 355.

³² Several Sethian gnostic texts, whether texts are Christian or non-Christian, demonstrate the descent myth of the redeemer figure like the Sophia or the Savior who descends to awake the sleeping souls from the power of Hades or Chaos, which is closely related to the water baptism for the gnostic initiate. See the “Pronoia Hymn” in the longer version of the *Apocryphon of John* (NHC II, 1.30.12-31), the Naasene Psalm (Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* 5.10.2), *Apocalypse of Adam* (NHC V, 5.83.4-7), *Gospel of Egyptians* (NHC III, 2.62.24-64.9), *Trimorphic Protennoia* (NHC XIII, 1). Cf. James M. Robinson, “Sethians and Johannine Thought: The Trimorphic Protennoia and the Prologue of the Gospel of John,” in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, vol. 2, *Sethian Gnosticism*, ed. Bentley Layton (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 643-70.

³³ Meeks, “Man from Heaven,” 45, mentions the Jewish wisdom myths that might influence John and gnostic myth.

ancient myths of gods or heroes into the underworld from the possible background of John, when he argues that “the motif [of descent and ascent] belongs exclusively to discourse, not to narrative” and there is no geography of Hades to be functioned in John.³⁴ This exclusion, however, might limit the cultural and religious milieu of the Greco-Roman world to the effect the original character of the myth is supposedly decided.

The historical link between John and the gnostic idea of descent is likely to reflect more diverse cultural influence within them. For example, the background of the mystery of Dionysian religion gives us a more understandable feature in John 2 and 6, seeing Jesus as a “new Dionysus” appearing in Galilee where Dionysus, a popular wine god, was well known to people.³⁵ Irenaeus seemed to have depended on the more popular myths of the descent when he repeatedly referred to the *Descensus Christi ad Inferos*, which had been known to the apostolic and post-apostolic fathers in the first and second centuries.³⁶

The gnostic myth of the redeemer’s descent into history, but not into Hades, is based on the dualistic view of the world (the heavenly home vs. this age of darkness) or the bipartite world (heaven and earth).³⁷ In this regard,

³⁴ Ibid., 50.

³⁵ Gregory J. Riley, “I Want Thought to Be What I Am Not: Docetic Jesus and the Johannine Tradition,” in *Occasional Papers of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity*, no. 31, ed. Jon Ma. Asgeirsson (Claremont: Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, 1994), 16-21.

³⁶ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1972), 379. See its references in Ignatius (*To the Mqagnesians* 9.2, *To the Trallians* 9.1), Polycarp (*To the Philippians* 1.2), Justin (*Dialogue with Trypho* 72), and Tertullian (*De anima* 55).

³⁷ In contrast to the three-story cosmos (Phil. 2:10) as a popular cosmology (heaven, earth, and underworld), a two-story universe (Col. 1:20) had been accepted as the philosophical cosmology (earth and seven heavens) in which Hades, the abode of the evil spirits, was often located in one of the lower of the seven heavens. While the Stoics

MacCulloch sees that “for Gnostics there can be no *descensus ad inferos* because their eschatology has no underground.”³⁸ In a later work, Bousset describes the gnostic understanding as follows:

[I]t must be pointed out that this myth of Christ’s descent into hell, in an interesting restructuring, has achieved a still much more intensive influence upon the pattern of Christian thought. In place of the descent of the hero into the underworld and hell there comes the appearing of Christ here upon earth. Seen from the standpoint of the heavenly world above, the earth is the place of darkness and of terror, thronged by the demons. The struggle of the redeemer-hero with the demons of the depths becomes the struggle of Christ on the cross with the devil and the “archons” of this world, and his victorious ascent becomes the ascension from earth to heaven.³⁹

Irenaeus reports the Valentinian interpretation of Eph. 4:8-10 that Christ must have descended to “this world of ours,” in interpreting “Christ descended to the lowest regions of the earth” because they rejected the doctrine of Christ’s descent into Hades:

If, then, the Lord observed the law of the dead, that He might become the first-begotten from the dead, and tarried until the third day “in the lower parts of the earth”; then afterwards rising in the flesh, so that He even

placed *tartarus* in the air, Numenius saw it even higher in the planetary region. See Alan B. Scott, *Origen and the Life of Stars: A History of an Idea* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 87.

³⁸ MacCulloch, *Harrowing of Hell*, 150. It is certain that as the cosmology has changed from the three-story universe (heaven-earth-underworld) to the geocentric cosmology (earth-seven heavens-intelligible world) in late antiquity, the dead soul, especially the philosopher’s soul, was then told to be directly sent to the Isle of the Blessed (*Elysium*) that is now considered to be located in one of the seven heavens. For the souls of the philosophers, see Plato’s *Republic* 7.540 b-c; *Gorgias* 526a-d; *Phaedo* 81a; Cicero’s *De Republica* 6.18-20 (“dream of Scipio”). This change of cosmology came to weaken the idea of the physical Hades under the earth.

³⁹ Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 67. This work was also done in 1921 before the Nag Hammadi discovery.

showed the print of the nails to His disciples, He thus ascended to the Father;-[if all these things occurred, I say], how must these men [Valentinians] not be put to confusion, who allege that "the lower parts" refer to this world of ours, but that their inner man, leaving the body here, ascends into the super-celestial place? For as the Lord "went away in the midst of the shadow of death," where the souls of the dead were, yet afterwards arose in the body, and after the resurrection was taken up [into heaven], it is manifest that the souls of His disciples also, upon whose account the Lord underwent these things, shall go away into the invisible place allotted to them by God, and there remain until the resurrection, awaiting that event.⁴⁰

The dualistic understanding of the cosmic drama of Christ's redemption appears to need no subterranean picture of Hades because the gnostic system of the cosmos implies that this human world is already that of darkness under the demonic powers, like Hades.⁴¹

The motif of the descent into the underworld is mostly prominent in the gnostic literature, especially in the Nag Hammadi corpus.⁴² In its several gnostic tractates, the passion of Christ is considered as the work of the archons. But the Crucifixion is finally conceived as the defeat of the archons, which is

⁴⁰ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 5.31.2

⁴¹ Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 246, argues that Christ's conquering enemies in the air, on the earth, and in Hades is synthesized with the combat myth in hell. According to Josef Kroll, in *Gott und Hölle: Der Mythos vom Decensuskampfe* (Leipzig: R. G. Teubner, 1932), 35-36, such synthesis resulted in the collapse of the sharp distinction between the upper world of living men and the lower world of Hades. This synthesis might be seen in Origen's understanding of this world as the soul's imprisonment like the life of "upper Hades," even though he still has a concept of "lower Hades" as the place of the dead. See his *Peri Archon* 4.3.10.

⁴² See in the Nag Hammadi Codices (NHC), *Gospel of Truth* 26.4-23, *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* 51.24-31; 55.30-57.2; 58.28-32, *Trimorphic Protennoia* 43.4-44; 49.9-20, *Concept of Our Great Power* 41.14-42.23, *Tripartite Tractate* 89.20-35, *Sophia of Jesus Christ* (BG 122), and *Testimony of Truth* 3.32.23; cf. *Gospel of Nicodemus* 17.3-11, *Odes of Solomon* 22; 24; 33; 34.

conceptualized as the redeemer's descent to Hades.⁴³ Christ is persecuted by the powers of the left who want to "rule the universe" (*Tripartite Tractate* 121.10-14), the Demiurge ("your Lord") who "did these things" (*Second Apocalypse of James* 59.6-11), Jerusalem which is "a dwelling place of a great number of archons" (*First Apocalypse of James* 25.18-19), and the archons and Sasabek, "the ruler of Hades" (*Concept of Our Great Power* 41.13-30). Furthermore, in these tractates the Passion relates closely to other events in Christ's redemptive mission and plays an integral and necessary role in his work.

Christ's descent into Hades can be seen as one of Christ's important redemptive missions which represent the fact that Christ cannot be overcome in reality by suffering and death, since it would signal the victory of the archons. Even though those tractates differ in describing how Christ suffers, as to the degrees of physical reality (appearance, illusion, substitution, or fleshly reality),⁴⁴ the resultant mission of Christ is supposed to conquer the powers of darkness and archons.

The story of the Passion involves the necessary mission of Christ in Hades because Christ's Crucifixion as a consequence of his Incarnation into history contributes to making the Passion a dramatic cosmic struggle between the savior and the powers of the archons who enslave humankind to ignorance.

⁴³ James A. Cozby, *Gnosis and the Cross: The Passion of Christ in Gnostic Soteriology as Reflected in the Nag Hammadi Tractates*, Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1985 (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1985), 317-45. See also Majella Franzmann, *Jesus in the Nag Hammadi Writings* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 135-41.

⁴⁴ Karl-Wolfgang Tröger, *Die Passion Jesu Christi in der Gnosis nach den Schriften von Nag Hammadi*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Humboldt-Universität, 1978), 10-11, divides the five categories of the Nag Hammadi tractates on Christ's Passion: the explicit passion of the savior figure; the suffering foreign to the nature of Christ; the fleshly covering of the savior; substituting suffering for Christ; no Passion tradition.

Sasabek in Hades is put to shame by the destruction of his dominion when the savior raises the dead and prepares himself to go down [to Hades] (*Concept of Our Great Power* 41.7-42.23):

And he opened the gates of the heavens with his words. And he put to shame the ruler of Hades; he raised the dead, and he destroyed his dominion. Then a great disturbance took place. The archons raised up their wrath against him. They wanted to hand him over to the ruler of Hades. Then they recognized one of his followers. A fire took hold of his soul. He (Judas?) handed him over, since no one knew him (Jesus?). They acted and seized him. They brought judgment upon themselves. And they delivered him up to the ruler of Hades. And they handed him over to Sasabek for nine bronze coins. He prepared himself to go down and put them to shame. Then the ruler of Hades took him. And he found that the nature of his flesh could not be seized, in order to show it to the archons. But he was saying: "Who is this? What is it? His word has abolished the law of the aeon. He is from the Logos of the power of life." And he was victorious over the command of the archons, and they were not able by their work to rule over him.

In this tractate, the ruler of Hades, Sasabek, could not figure out the nature of Jesus' flesh when he suffers. The issue of the nature of Christ's flesh in his Passion becomes a central issue for the Gnostics, as in the John and Thomas tradition.⁴⁵ It is certain that Jesus' descent into the world has something to do with the cosmic battle between God and the powers of darkness and Hades, whether his flesh is real or not.

In the *Teaching of Silvanus*, the Passion of Christ is seen in terms of a struggle with the underworld, his death being the ransom and means which overcomes the underworld and frees the souls:⁴⁶

⁴⁵ The most comprehensive study on this subject is Gregory J. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

⁴⁶ Franzmann, 141.

For who is your guide into the darkness? How many likenesses did Christ take on because of you? Although he was God, he [was found] among men as a man. He descended to the underworld. He released the children of death. They were in travail, as the scripture of God has said. And he sealed up the very heart of it (the Underworld). And he broke its strong bows completely. And when all the powers had seen him, they fled so that he might bring you, wretched one, up from the Abyss, and might die for you as a ransom for your sin. He saved you from the strong hand of the Underworld. (103.30-104.14)

He [Christ] is also God and Teacher. This one, being God became man for your sake. It is this one who broke the iron bars of the Underworld and the bronze bolts. It is this one who attacked and cast down every haughty tyrant. It is he who loosened from himself the chains of which he had taken hold. He brought up the poor from the Abyss and the mourners from the Underworld. It is he who humbled the haughty powers; he who put to shame haughtiness through humility; he who cast down the strong and the boaster through weakness. (110.17-32)⁴⁷

This text of the *Teach. Silv.* relates the harrowing of hell with the OT imagery of victory over the enemies of Israel (1 Sam. 2:4; Ps. 37:14-15; 46:9; Jer. 51:56).⁴⁸

Malcolm sees both texts as Christ's Incarnation connected with the *Descensus*, in its transposing of the LXX wording of Ps. 106:10-16 to apply to the experiences of captives in Hades.⁴⁹ He argues that Hades is identified with this world of darkness so that the *Descensus* is Christ's Incarnation into history. From a gnostic viewpoint, this transformation of Christ's descent into human form ("many likenesses," 103.32) is a descent into the Hades of this world.⁵⁰ While some

⁴⁷ Translation comes from Malcolm L. Peel and Jan Zandee's section on "The Teaching of Silvanus," in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. James M. Robinson, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 389, 392.

⁴⁸ For more details of the scriptural references of its imagery, see Malcolm L. Peel, "The *Descensus Ad Inferos* in the *Teachings of Silvanus* (CG VII, 4)," *Numen* 26 (1979): 30-32.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵⁰ Even though Peel sees this gnostic tendency, he concludes that the *Teaching of Silvanus* is not Gnostic in that the text demonstrates that the Demiurge is none other

scholars⁵¹ reject identifying the descent into Hades with Christ's Incarnation described in this tractate, they still argue for the doctrine of Christ's descent into Hades, as the early church fathers formulated.

Gnosticizing the Myth as Disguised Descent

Christ's Incarnation into the world in the image of the descent into Hades or harrowing of hell seems to be influenced by the diverse gnostic ideas of the descent inherent in pre-Christian or non-Christian Gnosticism. According to Irenaeus' description of Simonian teaching, Simon taught that he himself descended as the Son of God among the Jews, as the Father in Samaria, and as the Holy Spirit among the other nations, allowing himself to be called whatever people might call him.⁵² And he was also described as one who came to set matters right by means of being transformed and made like the Principalities and Powers and Angels and appearing in turn as a man (*Adv. haer.* 1.23.3).⁵³ In this Simonian teaching, the divine descent of God, that is, Simon himself, is

than the good Father of Jesus Christ, in that the world is even viewed as revelatory of Divine Providence, and in that Christ's incarnation is real for humankind's sins, but not docetic. But I do not agree with his conclusion because there exists many gnostic ideas and language such as God the Monad, heavenly garment, sleep, forgetfulness, ignorance, light, and Bridal Chamber.

⁵¹ Franzmann, 142. See also Yvonne Janssens, *Les Leçons de Silvanos (NHC VII, 4)* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1983), 8-9.

⁵² Irenaeus, *Adversus haer.* 1.23.1. Translation from Dominic J. Unger, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons Against the Heresies, Book 1*, rev. John J. Dillon (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 82.

⁵³ Simon's disguised descent to earth is also recounted in Epiphanius, *Panarion* 21.2.4 ("I change my form in each heaven, according to the likeness of those who are there so as not to be recognized by my powers") and in Tertullian, *De anima* 34.4.

considered as the descending one with many forms (taking on different divinities and human forms), as in Jesus' Incarnation with "many likenesses"⁵⁴ (taking on different human forms, *Teach. Silv.* 103.32).

The Greek idea of "gods of many forms" had been widely known to the ancient people of the Greco-Roman world because the stories or myths of a *deus descensus* were popular themes in antiquity.⁵⁵ Simon Magus is said to have claimed that a certain Helen of Tyre was redeemed by him because she was a human form of the fallen First Thought (ἔννοια) of his Mind who "descended to the lower regions."⁵⁶ This Helen is claimed to be the final human form through the diverse human likenesses of ages since her fall. What is noteworthy is that where the *Ennoea* descended is called "the lower regions" which means "below the Pleroma." The same expression is found in the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* (Berlin Gnostic Codex 118) where "a drop from Light and Spirit descended to the lower regions (μέρος) of Almighty ruler of Chaos." The term, εἰς τὰ κατώτερα [μέρη] τῆς γῆς in Eph. 4:9 might be reflected in this phrase.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Gregory J. Riley, "Thomas Tradition and the *Acts of Thomas*," in *SBL Seminar Papers* (1991), 533-42, explains "Jesus of many forms" (*ATH.* 153) in terms of the heroic pattern of polymorphism and docetism only after death.

⁵⁵ Even though the definition and origin of docetism vary among scholars, the most original idea of docetism is likely to originate from the idea of a *deus descensus* with "god with many forms." The idea of god with many forms is explicitly applied to "Jesus with many forms, or many likenesses" in the apocryphal acts of Thomas, John and Peter. Luke's description of the missionary Paul shows this ancient popular theme of a *deus descensus* when Paul is misconceived as a deity by people when a miracle takes place around him in Acts 14:8-18 and 28:1-6. For a more comprehensive understanding of docetism, see Riley, *One Jesus, Many Christs*, 119-38.

⁵⁶ *Adv. haer.* 1.23.2.

⁵⁷ W. Hall Harris III, "The Ascent and Descent of Christ in Ephesians 4:9-10," *BSac* (1994), 202-3, argues that the most acceptable syntax of the genitive τῆς γῆς is the appositive genitive, by implying "the lower regions, namely, the earth," while it is also

It is argued that the author of the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* reinterpreted a gnostic myth of the fall of Sophia by way of christianizing the non-Christian soteriological material out of the source of *Eugnostos* material⁵⁸ and thereby identifying Christ with one of the actors in the non-Christian redemptive drama.⁵⁹ From the figure of redemptive Sophia who once fell away from androgynous aeons due to her causing existences without her male consort, the “lower regions” which came to have a “drop” from Sophia is considered as belonging to the world of “Almighty”(παντοκράτωρ). Thus the savior figure is said to descend to the lower regions (the material world) to wake that drop and cut off the work of robbers (107.15-17). The first person assertions of the revealer represent how the harrowing of Hades (redemptive descent) is transformed and gnosticized as a way of describing this world (lower regions) as the place of the soul’s oblivion (*BG* 120):

“Now I have taught you about Immortal Man and have loosed the bonds of the robbers from him. I have broken the gates of the pitiless ones in their presence. I have humiliated their malicious intent, and they all have been shamed and have risen from their ignorance.” (*BG* 121.14-122.5)

The disguised descent tradition is a theme familiar from gnostic sources.

The reason for the disguises in human forms (incarnation) or angelic ones

possible to consider it as a partitive genitive with μέρη which is omitted in P⁴⁶, D, F, G, and in the Western tradition. Therefore, he concludes that the text of Ephesians does not refer to the *Descensus Christi*. Wayne Grudem, “He Did Not Descend into Hell: A Plea for Following Scripture instead of the Apostles Creed,” *JETS* 34/1 (1991): 108, also claims that the phrase points to “genitive of apposition” and thereby means Christ’s incarnation, favoring the translation of the NIV, “What does ‘he ascended’ mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?”

⁵⁸ *NHC* III, 3 and V, 1.

⁵⁹ PHEME PERKINS, “The Soteriology of Sophia of Jesus Christ,” *SBL Seminar Paper* 49 (1971): 171-75.

(descent through the seven heavens) is that Christ has a divine plan to deceive, surprise, and overthrow the adversaries and the archons. Some early Jewish Christian sources demonstrate that Christ (the Word) descended to earth, dissimulating himself, by way of assuming the “likenesses” of angels or mortals, from the angelic powers who serve as doorkeepers in their heavenly spheres, when passing through the heavens.⁶⁰ This deceiving descent for the salvific effect is observed in the savior figure in the *Pistis Sophia*, as in Simon Magus’ alleged descent:

The Savior takes the form of the Angel Gabriel, so as not to be recognized by the Archons. (*Pistis Sophia* 7.12)

This wench [Helen], therefore, was the lost sheep, upon whom the Supreme Father, even Simon, descended, who, after he had recovered her and brought her back--whether on his shoulders or loins I cannot tell--cast an eye on the salvation of man, in order to gratify his spleen by liberating them from the angelic powers. Moreover, to deceive these he also himself assumed a visible shape; and reigning the appearance of a man amongst men, he acted the part of the Son in Judea, and of the Father in Samaria. (Tertullian, *De anima* 34.4)

Ophite Gnosticism is also described to have had such an idea of the disguised descent of Christ: Christ descended through the seven heavens and was made like to their sons and gradually deprived them of power (Irenaeus, *Adv.*

⁶⁰ Cf. *Physiologus Graecus*, recension B; *Ascension of Isaiah* 10.7-12, 20, 24, 29; *Epistle of Apostles* 13. See Daniélou, section on “The Hidden Descent,” 206-14, in *Theology of Jewish Christianity*. He claims that the theme of the disguised descent originated as an archaic Jewish Christian theology and that in a gnostic system the conception of the assimilation of the Word to the angels in the course of his descent is transferred together with the assimilation of the Jewish archangels to evil powers (archons). His basic position is that Gnosticism is of Jewish origin, with elements borrowed from Iran and Greece. I do not agree with him on the Jewish origin of “disguise” because the idea of disguise is more related with the docetic appearance of Jesus on earth in John, which originated from the Greek idea of “deity with many forms,” as in Dionysus’ appearance to the land of the Thebans as “changed into mortal image” in Euripides’ *Bacchae*.

haer. 1.30.12).⁶¹ Basilidean Gnosticism emphasizes the docetic Christ who assumed a human form of Simon of Cyrene at the Crucifixion. This deceptive way of transformation makes Christ remain unknown and incomprehensible to the archons of the world, as “an incorporeal Power” and “the ingenerate Father’s Mind.” This secrecy of identity is also given to the Basilidean elect as a gift for them to become the Aeons.⁶²

It appears that the gnostic *descensus* motif of the savior figure centers on the secret motif of identity, similar to the so-called “messianic secret.”⁶³ In John’s plot, he is using repetition of the theme of “misunderstanding” of Jesus’ identity on the part of disciples and people in order to make a point that Jesus is an enigmatic divine figure.⁶⁴ This incomprehension of Jesus’ identity results in Jesus’ death on the Cross. For John, however, the Crucifixion or death of Jesus is the victory as part of his glorification, which is considered as “John’s *peripeteia*, the falsification of expectation.”⁶⁵ Not in the manner expected by people, the Crucifixion means that Christ overcomes the powers of darkness in the material world or the underworld. The deceptive crucifixion and its paradoxical glorification is later developed and articulated as in the *Second*

⁶¹ The Ophites are said to claim that the heavenly Christ first clothed himself with his sister, Sophia and then descended on the earthly Jesus. Origen relates the cosmology of the Ophites when he criticizes Celsus’ argument on the subject of the seven ruling demons (spirits) according to their diagram (*Contra Celsus* 6.30-31).

⁶² Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.24.4-6.

⁶³ This term is derived from the classic study of William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, trans. J. C. G. Greig (Cambridge: J. Clarke, 1971). Originally published as *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901).

⁶⁴ For Jesus as the “enigma,” see Riley, *One Jesus, Many Christs*, 53-54, 87-90.

⁶⁵ R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 88.

Treatise of the Great Seth (NHC VII, 2, 55.30-56.20):

For (γάρ) my death which they think happened, (happened) to them in their error (πλάνη) and blindness. They nailed their man up to their death. For (γάρ) their minds (ἐννοιᾶ) did not see me, for (γάρ) they were deaf and blind. But (δέ) in doing these things, they render judgment against themselves. As for me, on the one hand (μέν) they saw me; they punished (κολάζειν) me. Another, their father, was the one who drank the gall and the vinegar; it was not I. They were hitting me with the reed; another was the one who lifted up the cross (σταυρός) on his shoulder, who was Simon. Another was the one on whom they put the crown of thorns. But (δέ) I was rejoicing in the height over all the riches of the archons (ἄρχων) and the offspring (σπορά) of their error (πλάνη) and their conceit, and I was laughing at their ignorance.⁶⁶

When the Christian gnostic authors come to grips with Christ's Passion, their answers to it differ according to the continuum of how much Christ's physical suffering is real.⁶⁷ One end of this continuum is that the suffering and death of Jesus is a real fact referring to his physical suffering (*Tripartite Tractate* 113.33-34; 114.34-35; 121.14-18; 133.30; *Letter of Peter to Phillip* 138.15-16, 18, *Apocryphon of James* 5.33-34; *Gospel of Truth* 18.22-35). The other end is that the heavenly Christ is differentiated from the earthly Jesus whose physical suffering has nothing to do with the former (*Second Treatise of the Great Seth* 55.10-19, 26-28, 30-34, 53.24-25; *Interpretation of Knowledge* 12.14-29; *Apocalypse of Peter* 81.10-11, 81.21-23).⁶⁸ This docetic passion of Jesus seems to

⁶⁶ Translation from Gregory J. Riley, "The Second Treatise of the Great Seth," in *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, ed. Birger A. Pearson (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 165-67.

⁶⁷ Franzmann's chapter 8, "The Close of the Earthly Context for Jesus," in *Jesus in the Nag Hammadi Writings*, 135-55, deals with how Jesus' suffering and death are described with variation in the Nag Hammadi texts, founding his argument on Tröger and Cozby.

⁶⁸ The docetic dichotomy between heavenly Christ and earthly Jesus is seen in the second- and third-century alleged heretics such as Cerinthus, Valentinians, Marcion, Paul

be central to the gnostic Christology because the Christian gnostic understanding of Jesus' physical suffering as the savior figure is not acceptable to them.

In the *Epistle of Peter to Phillip* 139.21-22, Peter summarizes that "Jesus is a stranger to this [physical] suffering," after he describes how Jesus physically suffered for them. This indicates that even though the Christian Gnostics accept Jesus' physical suffering to some degree, their Christology mainly tries to avoid the suffering of the heavenly figure of Christ by arguing for his descending on the alter-ego (earthly Jesus) or a deceptive body-double like Simon of Cyrene.⁶⁹ The deceptive Passion of Christ is the main Christological thrust of the Christian Gnostics. Thus the *Descensus Christi* is more freely used in terms of the cosmic victory over the adversaries of darkness.

The Son of Man Sayings with the Descent Motif

Some scholars link the Johannine Christology of the Son of Man to the Christology of the pre-existent Logos which is related with wisdom speculation and the Jewish apocalyptic (Daniel 7; 1 Enoch 48-49),⁷⁰ while it has been also agreed that the

of Samosata, while Paul intimates the existence of such dichotomy by his opponent in 1 Cor. 12:3, "no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says, 'Let Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit."

⁶⁹ See a body-double figure for Jesus' Passion in the *Apocalypse of Peter* (NHC VII, 3, 81.7-24), the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* (NHC VII, 2, 55.30-56.20) and Basilides' Simon of Cyrene (Irenaeus, *AH* 1.24.4). Against this docetic Christology, Irenaeus rejects the double figure of the invisible Christ and the visible Jesus in the redemptive work (*AH* 1.21.2).

⁷⁰ Moloney, *Johannine Son of Man*, 8, notes that Cullmann, Colpe, Dion, Vergote, Braun belong to this group. See also Burkett, 16-37.

title of “Son of Man” is a key to the Gospel of John.⁷¹ In using the title, “Son of Man” in Q, which appears nine times, most of them attest as the second layer of the apocalyptic projection of Q and demonstrate their uses for the support of the threat of judgment to those who reject the Q people.⁷² When one exception of the nine occurrences of the Son of Man sayings in Q is considered as related with the earlier layer of the wisdom tradition,⁷³ its real character is overlooked among scholars because the saying refers to the “heavenly Son of Man on earth for a time.”⁷⁴

And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. (Q 9:58// Mt 8:20)

Already in the early Q layer, Jesus as the Son of Man is seen as a “stranger” whose origin is heavenly. The Gnostics in general see this enigmatic origin of Jesus in his appearance on earth and suffering. In contrast to the apocalyptic projection of the Son of Man sayings in Q, John uses the Son of Man sayings for mythologizing Jesus’ gnostic descent as a heavenly stranger.⁷⁵

Following the trajectory of the myth of the descent, John adopts the preexistent figure of the Son and yet uses its gnostic motif of the deceived descent whose strangeness

⁷¹ The Gospel of John uses this title thirteen times – only once less than Mark.

⁷² Mack, “Christ and Jewish Wisdom,” 210-15.

⁷³ Ibid., 213. Rejecting its relation to the heavenly Sophia as far-fetched, John S. Kloppenborg considers this as having circulated as an independent Son of Man saying, from the evidence of a slightly gnosticized version found in *GTh*. 86, and being recast in the form of a *chria* and then attached to Q 9:59-62. See his book, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 190-92.

⁷⁴ Riley’s handout in Class NT 303 “Basic Aspects of the New Testament,” 2003 at Claremont School of Theology, adds this aspect of the heavenly Son of Man sayings to the traditional categories.

⁷⁵ This non-apocalyptic heavenly and gnostic feature of the Johannine Son of Man was recognized by O. Cullmann, W. Bauer, R. Bultmann, F. Borsch, S. Schulz, and W. Kümmel. See Burkett, 21-26.

provokes “misunderstanding” and “incomprehension” from people. This advanced phase of the mythological revision of the *descensus* tradition now applies to John’s Son of Man sayings.

Proclaimed as the Revealer (1:51)

It has been argued among some scholars that John’s descent-ascent Christology is associated with the Johannine Son of Man terminology.⁷⁶ The first appearance of the title of the Son of Man is in 1:51. This title continues to appear until 13:31 where Jesus said, “now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.”⁷⁷ This last reference to the title on the lips of Jesus in the scene of the Last Supper indicates that the Son of Man’s time of glorification has come as his Passion is imminent. It appears that the first reference to the self-designation of the Son of Man at the time of calling the first disciples in the first chapter, and the last reference to the title on the last night when he stays with the disciples in chapter 13, make a literary and theological *inclusio* in Jesus’ public ministry, by the sayings of the Son of Man.

The first introductory reference to the title builds upon the concepts of pre-existence and revelation of the Logos in the prologue. Although two Christologies are incorporated in the Fourth Gospel (Jesus as a subordinate agent of God, and the Logos as

⁷⁶ Burkett’s dissertation, *The Son of the Man in the Gospel of John*, starts with the issue that John’s use of the Son of Man with the descent/ascent motif cannot fit into the category of the Synoptic Son of Man sayings. Cf. E. M. Sidebottom, “The Descent and Ascent of the Son of Man in the Gospel of St. John,” *ATR* 39/2 (1957): 115-22; Meeks, “Man from Heaven,” 44-72; Godfrey C. Nicholson, *Death as Departure: The Johannine Descent-Ascent Schema* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983).

⁷⁷ The title appears in 1:51, 3:13, 5:26, 6:27, 6:51, 6:61, 8:28, 9:35, 12:23, 12:34, and 13:31.

the emanation of God),⁷⁸ the latter seems to be a distinctive Johannine Christology, when taking the high Christology of the Prologue into account, by admitting its integral literary and theological unity without the presumed insertion. In the scope of Jesus' public ministry, the motif of the descent and ascent starts with a strange saying:

And he said to him [Nathanael], "Truly, truly, I said to you (ὁμῖν, plural), you (plural) will see (ὄψεσθε) heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. (1:51)

Although this introductory reference to the identity of the Son of Man is regarded as significant in terms of John's Christology, scholars have come to little agreement concerning its interpretation.⁷⁹ The background of the opened heaven and the ascending-descending movement of the angels in this saying has been considered to be Gen. 28:12 (Jacob's ladder at Bethel) and its interpretation in contemporary Judaism.⁸⁰ As Talbert argues, in certain circles of ancient Jewish angelology, both B.C.E. and in the first and second centuries C.E., there existed a mythology with a descent-ascent pattern, in which the angelic redeemer descends, takes a human form, and then ascends back to heaven after the saving activity.⁸¹ But this angelic myth of descending-ascending as the redeemer figure seems to be denied in the first reference to the Son of Man.

The distaste for angel Christology is seen in the *Odes of Solomon* which is

⁷⁸ Albert C. Sundberg, "Christology in the Fourth Gospel," *BR* 21 (1976): 29-37.

⁷⁹ Moloney, *Johannine Son of Man*, 24.

⁸⁰ John W. Pryor, "The Johannine Son of Man and the Descent-Ascent Motif," *JETS* 34/3 (1991): 342.

⁸¹ Charles H. Talbert, "The Myth of a Descending-Ascending Redeemer in Mediterranean Antiquity," *NTS* 22 (1976): 418-39, argues that the Hellenistic-Jewish mythology of a descending-ascending redeemer is usually overlooked in scholarship, and contends that the angelic descending came to be merged with a figure in Jewish wisdom literature or the concepts of the Logos, Sophia, and Holy Spirit at the time of Philo.

considered as contemporaneous with the Fourth Gospel, when the descent and ascent pattern of the redeemer (*Odes* 12, 22, 23) is described with such names as “the Word” and “the Man” or “Son of Man” (*Odes* 36, 41).⁸² The denial of angelic Christology might imply John’s anti-docetic polemic, in that the angelic figure takes a bodily human form in the myths rather than the real human nature of the incarnated body, and the angels here are separated from and subordinated to the Son of Man. The angels’ ascending and descending upon the Son of Man draw on the image of the apocalyptic revelation by the opening of the heavens. This combined image indicates that Jesus is the only divine revealer and the only incarnated redeemer for the Johannine community.

One recognizes the verbal connections between verse 50 and 51 in “you shall see greater things” and “you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” This motif of “seeing” permeates throughout the Gospel as the Johannine community is considered as having the privilege of “seeing the Father through the Son” (1:18; 6:46; 14:9). As Meeks argues, “seeing God” could be an audacious claim in the context of the mission of the Johannine Christians within a Jewish community, if Philo’s description of Israel as “the race that sees God” is far-fetched here, compared with the Johannine claim.⁸³

The “seeing” of Nathanael and the Johannine community is related with the divine Son of Man who has become a real man, not taking on an angelic human form. This introductory reference to the Son of Man functions as a polemical proclamation against

⁸² Ibid., 434, citing James H. Charlesworth, *John and Qumran* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1972), 109.

⁸³ Wayne A. Meeks, “The Divine Agent and His Counterfeit in Philo and the Fourth Gospel,” in *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Elisabeth S. Fiorenza (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 58. See Philo, *The Confusion of Tongues*, 95-97, 146-47.

the Hellenistic Jewish myth of the angelic descent with docetic ideas.⁸⁴ More importantly, John emphasizes that where Jesus as the Son of Man is, there is the Father. When one sees Jesus, one can see God the Father, proving oneself to be “a true Israelite” (1:47).⁸⁵ This understanding of the Son of Man as the gateway or door to heaven⁸⁶ might serve as the reason why the cleansing of the Temple is transposed in John 2 to an earlier period of Jesus’ public ministry than the Synoptic tradition. The Son of Man is seen as the replacement of the Temple where heaven and earth connect as a microcosm of the cosmos,⁸⁷ as Johannine Christianity tries to cope with the destruction of the Second Temple,⁸⁸ while rabbinic Judaism replaces it with the Torah.

He Alone Descended (3:13)

The descent idea combined with the Son of Man in 3:13 is denied by Pryor, who rejects a descent-ascent Christology in John in the above-mentioned

⁸⁴ As a Scriptural example, Abraham met the angels in human forms and ate with them (Gen. 18:2, 8). The figure of מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה in the Old Testament frequently takes a visible human form (Exod. 3:2; Judg. 13:6; 1 Kings 19:7).

⁸⁵ Cf. “Israel” might etymologically mean “seeing God.”

⁸⁶ Sidebottom, “Ascent and Descent of the Son of Man,” 115, notes that “Jesus is the point of union between heaven and earth.”

⁸⁷ Davies, *Gospel and the Land*, 296-98; Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 375, argues that “the temple or sacred city as the place through which the *Axis Mundi* passes is held to be a point between heaven, earth, and hell.”

⁸⁸ John 2:18-22 indicates that the saying of the historical Jesus, “destroy the Temple, I will raise it up” is accepted as a reference to Jesus’ bodily resurrection, while Matthew (26:61) has it referred to by the false witness at the Sanhedrin; Mark (14:58-59) blurs its origin from the historical Jesus by saying that the witnesses do not agree on the exact words of Jesus.

saying of the Son of Man.⁸⁹ Although this verse can be a strong case for a “descending” motif as a descent myth (gnostic), he rejects it, by appealing to Talbert’s claim that the myth existed in pre-Christian Judaism and alongside first- and second-century Christianity.⁹⁰ He continues to say that the structure of 3:13 points to the ascension motif, and not the descent:

	καὶ	
A οὐδεὶς		A' υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου
B ἀναβέβηκεν		B' καταβάς
C εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν	εἰ μὴ	C' ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ

Moloney, however, argues that this grammatical clumsiness points to the unique revealer as the Son of Man who descended from above, denying the Mosaic tradition (the possibility of any human agent for the revelation of the things from above through *ascension*).⁹¹

The descent and ascent of the Son of Man in John do not appear to depend on the apocalyptic vision of “ascent” of such saints as Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and Isaiah in the Jewish apocalyptic.⁹² Rather, it is emphasized

⁸⁹ Pryor, “Johannine Son of Man and the Descent-Ascent Motif,” 346-49.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 348, citing Talbert, “Myth of a Descending-Ascending Redeemer,” 430.

⁹¹ Moloney, 51-67. The polemic against the mystic ascent of Moses is accepted by Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), when the contemporary belief in Moses’ ascent on Mount Sinai and at the end of his life is evidenced in Philo, Josephus, the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings of the first century as well as in the later rabbinic and Samaritan writings. This polemic was already demonstrated in the second-century rabbinic midrash Mekilta on Exodus 19:20, which says: “neither Moses nor Elijah ever went up to heaven, nor did the Glory ever come down to earth, citing *Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael*, ed. and trans. Jacob Lauterbach, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1933), 224.

⁹² Sidebottom, 119. Bultmann, *Gospel of John*, 150, notes that this verse is not concerned with a polemic against the mystic ascent, but with one who first descended as pre-existent and then ascended.

that the Son of Man alone descended because only he has a pre-existent heavenly origin. The visionary ascension motif is not John's concern because he emphasizes the significance of Christ's only descent from above as pre-existent, as long as John has a theological thrust of Jesus' descent-ascent in terms of the gnostic journey of the soul (the pre-existent being's coming to the world and the return to the heavenly place),⁹³ while the mystic ascent of the visionaries is simply apocalyptic in its nature.

As Sidebottom notes, 3:13 might be the triumphant answer of the Evangelist to the Wisdom question, "who has ascended into heaven and come down?" (Prov. 30:4).⁹⁴ This might go back to the Deuteronomic rhetorical question to raise the human impossibility:⁹⁵

Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?" No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe. (Deut. 30:11-14)

The impossibility of human ascension to get the heavenly wisdom is contrasted with the divine descent of the Son of Man whose origin is "above." Only the

⁹³ David M. Reis, *The Journey of the Soul: Its Expressions in Early Christianity*, Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate University, 1999 (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1999), 264-98, argues that while the *Gospel of Thomas* describes the entire journey of the souls on the model of Jesus, John is more concerned with the latter part of the journey, based on Jesus' entire journey of the soul (the descent of the preexistent one and his return to the Father).

⁹⁴ Ibid., 120.

⁹⁵ In Rom. 10:6-8, Paul also uses this Deuteronomic rhetorical question to affirm the cosmic lordship of Christ by appealing to the only divine descent and ascent of Christ.

one who came from above is qualified to speak of τὰ ἐπουράνια (“heavenly things,” 3:12). This symbolic feature of the descent and ascent of the Son of Man is properly understood as the descent-ascent, not vice-versa.⁹⁶

This pattern of the descent-ascent follows the gnostic mythology⁹⁷ in which the redeemer figure (Sophia or Savior) descends into the world of darkness to awaken the sleeping souls. The gnostic understanding of the redeemer figure’s descent into the world comes from the fact that the earth is the place of darkness and terror, where the devil and the archons rule, and the souls are to be awakened by the redeemer for their return to heaven.⁹⁸ For John, the term “world” (κόσμος) means “a dark system of power inimical to God,”⁹⁹ which is symbolized in the figurative expressions such as “darkness,” “night,” and “blind.” Nicodemus visited Jesus at night and confessed that Jesus came from God. Although the Fourth Gospel refers to the fact that there are some secret believers among the ἄρχοντες (rulers),¹⁰⁰ Nicodemus represents a larger group of the Pharisees and the rulers of

⁹⁶ Reis, *Journey of the Soul*, 282, points out the recognition of the proper pattern of descent-ascent in this verse by Nicholson, *Death as Departure*, 91-103.

⁹⁷ Meeks, *Prophet-King*, 297, comments that 3:13 is connected with gnostic mythology, while rejecting that this description of the ascension is paralleled neither in the gnostic myths nor in the Moses legends because of the central paradox that Jesus’ being lifted up and his glorification take place in and through his death on the cross.

⁹⁸ Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 67.

⁹⁹ Gregory J. Riley, in his class handout at NT 427 “John and the Johannine Literature,” 2003 at Claremont School of Theology, categorizes the Johannine term the “world” in three different aspects: the material universe, a dark system of power inimical to God, and the sum total of humanity.

¹⁰⁰ 12:42 implies that many of the authorities secretly believed in Jesus, but did not confess because of the fear of excommunication from the synagogue (ἀποσυνάγωγος, 9:22; 16:2). J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), argues that this historical situation of the Johannine community reflects the second layer of John’s Gospel, apart from the historical Jesus. John repeatedly emphasizes that there is a σχίσμα among the ordinary people and the

the Jews.¹⁰¹ More significantly, it seems that Nicodemus represents a human being in the world of darkness where “the ruler of the world” (12:31; 14:30; 16:11) controls humanity.

De Jonge notes that the negative opening statement on ἄνθρωπος (2:23-25) and the equally negative final judgment on the Ἰουδαῖοι (12:37-42) culminate in the middle of a long debate between Jesus and the Jews who come to be judged as “descendents of the devil” (8:44) and “slaves to sin” (8:34).¹⁰² I think that this introductory judgment on ἄνθρωπος before the dialogue between Nicodemus and Jesus makes significant the ensuing monologue of Jesus on the role of the Son of Man in his descending into the world. As a typical Johannine discourse first appears in this dialogue between Nicodemus and Jesus,¹⁰³ it is likely that the Evangelist reveals his theological understanding of the heavenly origin of Jesus, together with his cosmology and anthropology as backgrounds to it. The gnostic judgment on humanity in the material world and even the Sethian gnostic attempt to demonize “descendents of Abraham” (Jews)¹⁰⁴ and the demiurge (the creator) of the Hebrew Bible might be a gnostic background to the harsh words against the

Jewish leaders about the identity of Jesus (7:43; 9:16; 10:19).

¹⁰¹ Marinus de Jonge, chapter 2, “Nicodemus and Jesus: Some Observations on Misunderstanding and Understanding in the Fourth Gospel,” in *Jesus, Stranger from Heaven and Son of God: Jesus Christ and the Christians in Johannine Perspective*, trans. John E. Steely (Missoula, MT: Published by Scholars Press for the Society of Biblical Literature, 1987), 30. Originally this was delivered at the Manson Memorial Lecture in the University of Manchester in 1970.

¹⁰² Jonge, 32.

¹⁰³ Bultmann, *Gospel of John*, 132, sees the primary element in the episode as “discourse” which is taken from the source of “revelation-discourses.” The episode centers on *das Kommen des Offenbarers* for the necessity of “born from above.”

¹⁰⁴ In the pericope, the counterpart of Jesus’ dialogue is the Pharisees and the scribes (8:3, 13).

leaders of Jerusalem. The negative judgment on ἄνθρωπος in the episode is referred to as “you do not receive our testimony” (3:11) and “no one receives his testimony” (3:31), which refers back to the Prologue (“the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it,” “yet the world knew him not,” “his own people received him not”). In spite of this rejection of the world and humanity, the coming of the Revealer for the world is significantly explained with the title of the Son of Man in 3:13-14.

Together with a gnostic background to the dualistic contrast between heaven and earth, spirit and flesh, and descending from above and ascending to the Father, the gnostic myth of the descent of the Sophia or savior figure might be helpful in understanding the role of the Son of Man in Jesus’ monologue. It has been noted that the concluding *Pronoia Hymn* in the longer version of the *Apocryphon of John* (NHC II, 1.30.12-31) is the early evidence of the spiritualized Sethian baptismal rite of the “five seals” before the later Christianized Sethian texts.¹⁰⁵ This text demonstrates that the divine Pronoia’s three descents into “Chaos” or “Hades” are narrated in the first person singular, referring to her saving work of raising up the sleeping souls of her seed from the chain of prison which is identified with Hades. MacRae notes that this hymn of Pronoia’s descent is a classic example of the call of awakening from above, which H. Jonas has described principally on the basis of Mandeian and Manichean

¹⁰⁵ This is expanded and systematized in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (NHC XIII, 1.47.7-20, 48.31-35, 50.9-11) in a way of the three-revelation schema by associating it with the trimorphic deity.

example.¹⁰⁶ This revealer's descent into the world ("lower regions") is mainly made to awaken the sleeping souls in the world of darkness, based on the facts: the world is the material world; it is itself already the realm of the dead.

As the theme of the sleep of the soul functions as an integral part of the gnostic myth, so it does for John in using the metaphor of "darkness" (1:5, 3:19, 8:12, 12:35, 12:46), "night" (3:2, 9:4, 11:10, 13:30, 19:39, 21:3), "blind" (9:25, 9:39) in order to indicate that the people in this world are sleeping because of the darkness of the material world. John dramatically uses this theme of "sleep and awakening" in the episode of raising Lazarus. Jesus spoke to the disciples when he spent two more days after he heard that Lazarus was ill:

Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to *awaken* him." (11:9-11)

The episode of Nicodemus shows that he and his group (secret believers but still belonging to the Jewish synagogue) remain in the state of the material world ("night"). Even though this group claims that "we know" (οἶδαμεν, 3:2), they still misunderstand the words of Jesus. The witness of the Johannine community to the words of Jesus is contrasted in using the same language:¹⁰⁷ "we speak of what we know (οἶδαμεν), and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony" (3:11). This witness is likely to be defined as

¹⁰⁶ George MacRae, "Sleep and Awakening in Gnostic Texts," in *Le Origini Dello Gnosticismo Colloquio di Messina* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 497; Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 68-91.

¹⁰⁷ Jonge, 38.

the “heavenly things” (ἐπουράνια), while the “earthly things” (ἐπίγεια) obviously belong to the material world, as in the gnostic understanding of it or things mentioned in vv. 3-8.¹⁰⁸ If the descent of the Son of Man, as the light of the world to awake the sleeping souls, is considered to be the “heavenly things,” the witness to this descent is to make the Johannine community seemingly more gnostic because their knowledge (“we speak of what we know,” 3:11) is about the revelation of the gnostic redeemer.

Whether or not there was a pre-Christian Gnosticism or a pre-Christian gnostic redeemer myth embedded in the episode of Nicodemus, the motif of the descent-ascent reflects the popular belief in the journey of the soul in that “the soul, as an essentially separate essence from the body with both a pre- and post-mortem existence, is viewed as participating in a journey: from the divine realm, it descends into materiality, whereupon it seeks to return to its original home.”¹⁰⁹ Interestingly, whereas Jesus does not mention the human soul (ψυχή) in the episode,¹¹⁰ he talks about the incomprehensibility of the wind (πνεῦμα) in 3:8.¹¹¹ If this incomprehensible movement of the wind reflects a Pythagorean contention that “faculties of the soul are winds” or “the unlimited breath enters the

¹⁰⁸ Bultmann, *Gospel of John*, 147-48.

¹⁰⁹ Reis, *Journey of the Soul*, 114, argues that Orphism, Pythagoreanism, and Empedocles in the Pre-Socratic period has a decisive impact on the history of the concept of the journey of the soul, based on an anthropological dualism that highlights the intrinsic difference between body and soul.

¹¹⁰ In John, ψυχή appears only ten times. Most of them mean “life” in a non-technical sense. Reis thinks that John is not concerned with developing the notions of pre-existence, immortality, or an explicit anthropological dualism, based on the technical concept of soul. See Reis, 267.

¹¹¹ It seems that John replaces *psyche* with *pneuma* for the person’s spiritual principle. Reis sees this replacement in the *Gospel of Thomas*, logion 29.

universe,”¹¹² the saying might intimate the descent and ascent of the soul.¹¹³ The contrast between “flesh” and “spirit” emphasizes the divine element of “being born of the Spirit.” It seems to me that even though John does not depend on the dualistic anthropology (body-soul), he still applies its image (the journey of the soul: “you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes”)¹¹⁴ to the descent and ascent of the Son of Man. If the soul by itself cannot return to the spiritual realm, from John’s perspective of the world and humanity, the redeemer (Christ) or the Spirit is needed to help every individual soul to return to the place of “above.”

Only the one who can descend from above can lead souls into “the dwelling place” (the gnostic *Pleroma*?) in the Father’s house (14:2). The journey of the soul in Jesus (8:14, 13:33) is Christologically applied to the descent-ascent of the Son of Man, while using the myth of the redeemer’s descent:

Jesus answered, “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. (8:14)

Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ (13:33)

¹¹² Ibid., 93, citing Diogenes Laertius 8.30, 24. He also cites Aristotle, *De anima* 410b.28-31, who quotes Orpheus’s alleged poem that says, “the soul, borne by the winds, enters from the universe into animals when they breathe.”

¹¹³ For the development of the concept of the ascent of the soul, see Frederick van Fleteren, “The Ascent of the Soul in the Augustinian Tradition,” in *Paradigms in Medieval Thought Applications in Medieval Disciplines: A Symposium*, ed. Nancy van Deusen and Alvin E. Ford (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 93-110.

¹¹⁴ This expression resembles the gnostic questions of Theodotus, a Valentinian: “Who were we? What have we become? Where were we? Whither have we been cast? Whither do we hasten? From what have we been set free?,” citing Clement of Alexandria, *Exc. Theod.* 78.2.

The philosophical understanding of the soul's journey appears to stand behind the text, while the only one descent of the Son of Man makes the journeys of the elect souls possible.¹¹⁵

He Became a Seal (6:27)

John appears to use the diverse religious myths and beliefs that flourished in the first century C.E. when he concerns himself with the title of the Son of Man. Like the figure of judgment in Jewish apocalyptic literature as in Daniel 7:13, the Similitudes of Enoch (*1 Enoch*, chs. 37-71), and *4 Ezra* 13, John 5:27 reflects the apocalyptic tradition by saying that the Son of Man has been given authority to execute judgment.¹¹⁶ This apocalyptic figure of the Son of Man¹¹⁷ does not fit into the description of chapter 6 where the verb “descend” (καταβαίνω)¹¹⁸ is used seven times of Jesus as the one who came down as bread from heaven (6:33, 38, 41, 42, 50, 51, 58). It is noteworthy that this verb is prominently used in this chapter. The “bread” is specifically identified as the

¹¹⁵ Reis fully argued the descent-ascent of Jesus in the perspective of Jesus on the journey of the soul in one section of his dissertation, *Journey of the Soul*, 264-96.

¹¹⁶ Bultmann, *Gospel of John*, 260-61, thinks that 5:27b (ὅτι υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν) is added by the ecclesiastical redactor to bring the statement into line with the traditional apocalyptic eschatology in 5:28f.

¹¹⁷ Burkett, 17, lists the scholars who argue that the Johannine Son of Man is not essentially different from the traditional apocalyptic figure of the Son of Man in the Synoptic tradition.

¹¹⁸ Other verbs, used for the motif of “descend” are ἔρχομαι (1:9, 11, 15; 3:2, 8, 19; 5:43; 7:28; 8:14, 42; 9:39; 10:10; 12:27, 46, 47; 14:3, 18, 28; 15:22; 16:28; 18:37) and ἐξέρχομαι (8:42; 13:3; 16:27, 28, 30; 17:8). For the complete list, see Nicholson, *Death as Departure*, 52.

Son of Man (6:27, 63). At the conclusion of this discourse, Jesus asks, "What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!" (6:62).

Significantly John develops chapter 6 in a way similar to Christian gnostic revelation dialogues, while he may well know the structure of the traditional gospel and even more specific groupings of traditional material (feeding of the 5,000 and walking on the sea, Mk 6-8).¹¹⁹ A characteristic feature of gnostic revelation dialogue is the account of the perplexities and the troubling questions of the recipients before the appearance of the heavenly revealer.¹²⁰ The perplexity and the lack of knowledge of the disciples are seen in 6:60-61:

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you?"

C. H. Dodd argues that the whole dialogue can be understood with the clue of 6:63, "it is πνεῦμα that gives life, the σὰρξ is of no avail."¹²¹ This passage is apparently contradicted in the previous passage, "very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (6:53). It is certain that John corrects any literalistic understanding of "eating the flesh and drinking the blood". Against the background of the polemics against

¹¹⁹ George W. MacRae, "The Fourth Gospel and Religionsgeschichte," *CBQ* 32 (1970): 16; John Painter, "Tradition and Interpretation in John 6," *NTS* 35 (1989): 422-26.

¹²⁰ Gerard P. Luttikhuisen, "The Evaluation of the Teaching of Jesus in Christian Gnostic Revelation Dialogues," *NovT* 30/2 (1988): 158, notes that the revelation dialogues show that the disciples play the role of the perplexed and ignorant recipients before the resurrected Jesus, in such Nag Hammadi texts as the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, the *Apocryphon of John*, and the *Letter of Peter to Philip*.

¹²¹ C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), 341.

docetism,¹²² John proclaims that to eat the “flesh” of Jesus means metaphorically the life-giving action of the incarnated Logos who is the words (ῥήματα) which give πνεῦμά and ζώη (6:63b). This conclusive comment of Jesus on his enigmatic revelation dialogue seems to be closely related with the role of the descent of the Son of Man in the first reference to the Son of Man in chapter 6.

In this dialogue, Jesus gives an admonition to the crowd so that they might eat the eternal food that the Son of Man will give:

“Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you; for God the Father sealed (ἐσφράρισεν) him.” (6:27)

Jesus’ response to the crowd who seek signs and food (vv. 22-24) demonstrates that the crowd still remains “earth bound” and “fleshly” because they interpret who Jesus is fleshly.¹²³ The contrast between the perishing food and the eternal food is made in line with Jesus’ nourishment with eternal water (4:14) which is compared with physical water. The Son of Man as a giver of the spiritual nourishment becomes the object of “eating” and “drinking” in vv. 51b-58, which has been considered to be later inserted by an ecclesiastical redactor to introduce a sacramental teaching.¹²⁴ The whole dialogue, however, without the isolation of 51b-58,¹²⁵ seems to point to the significant role of the Son of Man who will

¹²² Riley, “I Was Thought to Be What I Am Not,” 18-21; Pryor, 343.

¹²³ Moloney, 109.

¹²⁴ Bultmann, *Gospel of John*, 234; James D. G. Dunn, “John VI – A Eucharistic Discourse?,” *NTS* 17 (1970-71): 328.

¹²⁵ Dunn, 330-32, rejects such an idea of interpolation which is discussed by Bultmann and Brown; R. Alan Culpepper, “John 6: Current Research in Retrospect,” in *Critical Readings of John 6*, ed. *idem* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 253, notes that other

finally ascend to where he was before, whose consequence will give “spirit” and “life” through his words.

The sealing act (σφραγίς) of the Father attesting the descent of the Son of Man who gives life to the believers is a kind of logic or symbol of myth embedded in the descent-ascent of the Son of Man. The same term σφραγίζω is used to indicate that the believer who has seen and heard the testimony of the one who comes from above *certifies* (“mark with seal”) the truth of God (3:33). Although John does not explicitly use this term to describe Christian baptism (e.g., 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 2 Clem. 7:6),¹²⁶ the descent of the Son of Man draws a demarcation in the history of humanity, which could be a “seal,”¹²⁷ whether or not the language connotes a Johannine ritual. God validates the ministry of the Son of Man, while the believers do God’s truth through his testimony on the area of πνεύμα.

John emphasizes that the words (ῥήματα) of God are spoken by Jesus as

contributors (Anderson, Painter, Kysar), with surprising unanimity, contend that 6:51c-58 is an integral part of the chapter.

¹²⁶ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 287. Cf. Wolfgang Langbrandtner, *Weltferner Gott oder Gott der Liebe: Der Ketzerstreit in der Johanneischen Kirche; Eine Exegetische-Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung mit Berücksichtigung der Koptischgnostischen Texte aus Nag-Hammadi* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1977), 84ff, argues that a sharp gnostic cosmological dualism is articulated as the basis for an a-sacramental, conventicle-type Christianity dedicated to a realized eschatology, cited in Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John*, 10.

¹²⁷ Birger A. Pearson, “Theurgic Tendencies in Gnosticism and Iamblichus’s Conception of Theurgy,” in *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, ed. Richard T. Wallis (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 253-75. He notes that three gnostic texts of Sethian Gnosticism such as the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (NHC III, 2), the *Three Steles of Seth* (NHC VII, 5), and *Marsanes* (NHC X, 1) show the rituals of baptism, cultic ascension, and the ritual of the soul’s descent and ascent. The term seal, σφραγίς (five or thirteen), is related with the ritual, symbolizing the motif of the soul’s descent and ascent.

the incarnated Logos (3:34; 6:63). D. Burkett argues that the whole dialogue of the Bread (6:27-71) has some parallels with Isaiah 55:1-3 and 10-11.¹²⁸

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and *your soul* (נַפְשְׁכֶם, ψυχῇ ὑμῶν) will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that *your soul* may live. (Isa. 55:1-3)

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is *my word* that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (55:10-11)

Burkett notes that the verses of Isaiah emphasize two types of foods of which the satisfying food is the listening to the word of God (55:2) which “goes forth from the mouth of God” and “gives bread to eat” and shall “return to God without the empty hand,” accomplishing God’s will. It is argued that the Word of God is marked with a seal in the Son of Man as a messenger from above.¹²⁹ The emphasis on the spoken words (ῥήματα) of Jesus as the sustainer of “spirit” and “life” (6:63) points to the function of the Son of Man who gives the source of God to the souls as the Logos. It is likely that this theological point leads to the similar theological one made in the *Authentikos Logos* (NHC VI, 3).

In this tractate, the role of the Logos is to awaken and teach the soul imprisoned in the body to restore her incorporeal reality.¹³⁰ The free-will of the

¹²⁸ Burkett, 129-41.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 135.

¹³⁰ R. Van Den Broek, “The Authentikos Logos: A New document of Christian Platonism,” *VC* 33 (1979): 281, argues that this work originated from the Christian

soul, under the guidance of the Logos that is motivated by her heavenly bridegroom, results in fighting for the contest in this world. Seen from the extensive use of metaphors of the origin, condition, and destiny of the soul, the author seems to know the Johannine metaphors. He refers to God alone who exists as “Father” and the author’s adversaries as “sons of the devil.” The recurring motif of food (“the food of death” and “the immortal food”) appears in this tractate.

Without the divine figure of mediator, the ascent of the soul is possible when she is awakened to her true identity.¹³¹ The self-awakening of the soul in this world can be realized as the victory in the contest that was given from the Father (ὁ ὢν). For John, however, it is impossible that the soul can be awakened to return to the above without the Logos who descended into the lower world as the Son of Man. The *paideia* of soul is only possible through the word of God. Whereas, in the *Authentikos Logos*, the possibility of the soul to return to the above lies in the fact that the *nous* of the soul has a share with the divine *Nous*,¹³² John sees the redemption of the soul realized in Jesus’ death and its salvific significance, which are implied in the “lifting up” sayings (3:14; 8:28; 12:34).

The Son of Man has the eternal food for the believers to eat and live in

Platonists of Alexandria because of its strong influence from Neo-Platonism.

¹³¹ This theological thought-world is also expressed in the *Gospel of Thomas*, when the author emphasizes the pre-existent “light” is already in all humanity (83.1; 24.3). It manifests that the human soul belongs to heaven and it prepares to return there (18.1-2; 49; 50).

¹³² Broek, 276. He identifies the bridegroom with the divine *Nous* in heaven.

“spirit” and “life.” John identifies that food with the Son of Man himself in whom the Logos became incarnated. His testimony on God the Father is the same as the spoken words of God, which function as the bread of life. For John, the souls in this world need the mediator to be awakened to return to the above because they are as sleeping, as dead, under the “ruler of the world” (12:31; 14:30; 16:11). The mediator is called “the Son of Man.” There is no way out for the soul in this world. But the Son of Man as the Logos incarnated has a seal from God. That seal is the words of God that make the soul pneumatic and awakened.

Summary

The myth embedded in John’s sayings of the Son of Man as a mythical revision of the *descensus* tradition seems to reflect the diverse traditions and beliefs that flourished around the first century C.E. – such as the journey of the soul, the divine descent of gods, angels, or heroes in human form, and the cosmological or theogonic battle myth in the underworld, which were prevalent at the time of John. Although the pre-Christian gnostic descent myth of the redeemer, as in the Sethian gnostic texts, or the wisdom myth in Hellenistic Judaism, might influence the Christological motif of the descent and ascent of the Johannine Son of Man more than other religious myths, one cannot simply exclude other diverse religious elements from John’s dependence on the confluence of those myths and beliefs in late antiquity. Whether they can be called the

“basic descent myth” or the “developing myth of Sophia” in the Hellenistic age, it came to be conceptualized and mythologized for a Johannine Christology in relation to Jesus’ self-reference to the Son of Man sayings.

John’s cosmology and anthropology are very similar to the gnostic understanding of the cosmos and humanity when the cosmos under the “ruler of the world” is considered to be “dark” and its inhabitants are regarded as being imprisoned in the material world (“below”). As John claims, only the Son of Man as the incarnated Logos can set the stage for the redemption or immortality of the soul for humanity because he is the only Begotten of God (μονογενὴς θεός) as the fullness (πλήρωμα) of God’s emanation. The descent of the Son of Man cannot be comparable to the human visionary ascent to bring a revelation for the salvation of the soul, because Jesus is pre-existent (3:13).

Some docetic understandings of Jesus’ descent into the world seem to be polemically rejected when Jesus is the only legitimate revealer incarnated (1:51), replacing the Temple with his body, while the flesh of the Son of Man is consumed for humanity (6:51b-57). These sayings of the Johannine Son of Man do not easily fit into the Synoptic tradition of the Son of Man who is considered to be an apocalyptic figure of judgment. Rather his sayings provoke misunderstanding and incomprehension from people “of flesh.” The more fitting category of Jesus’ coming to the world is the “gnostic deceptive descent,” through which two powers (God and devil) contend for human loyalty. It is certain that John uses the *descensus* tradition in a way similar to gnostic cosmological dualism. Thus the phase of the trajectory of the myth embedded in a Johannine

Christology is more developed in a later stage, as in the Nag Hammadi literature.

The divine testimony of the Son of Man on heavenly things (τὰ ἐπουράνια) becomes a “seal” of God which makes the Johannine community more gnostic sectarian in terms of their claim that “we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen but still you people do not accept our testimony” (3:11). While they claim to know the things of God or heaven, they retrospect on how they easily misunderstood the words of the Son of Man because of His strangeness in this world. They, however, believe that the Son of Man speaks the words of God as the only mediator to awaken the souls in this world of darkness. Marked with the seal of God, the Johannine community proclaims on the lips of Jesus, “I have conquered the world” (16:33). The descent and ascent of the Son of Man made this victory possible for the souls after His divine combat. The goal of the soul’s immortality as well as the physical resurrection reflected in Jesus’ resurrection is now expected from the descent and ascent of the Son of Man.

CHAPTER 6

Christ's Descent to Hades in the Baptismal Context:

1 Peter 3:18-22

The earliest biblical implication of the *Descensus Christi* is Paul's rhetorical questions in Rom. 10:6-7.¹ The Christological understanding of the descent seems to arise independently of the Petrine passage because there are other such biblical passages as Pauline and Paulinist passages² which allude to the descent of Christ. This demonstrates that the *descensus* tradition has a long history already in the 1st century of the church.

What is important in understanding the Petrine passage (1 Pet. 3:18-22) is that this enigmatic passage contributes to the Petrine understanding of Jesus' suffering as well as his mission. More significantly, this passage reveals how the Petrine Christians understand their Christian baptism undergoing physical persecutions or social pressures in a pagan society. The heroic or divine descent into Hades, as a popular myth of the Greco-Roman religion including the areas of Mesopotamia, seems to have influenced these Petrine passages so that the cosmological significance of Jesus' descent into Hades was conceptualized and mythologized in the baptismal context for the proclamation of the Christian victory over the evil powers.

The descent myth or motif, appearing in world religions and ancient

¹ Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (London: SCM Press, 1980), 288, argues that Paul for the first time in the New Testament joins Christ's ascension to his descent into "the abyss (ἄβυσσος)."

² Eph. 4:6-9; Col. 1:15-20, 2:15; 1 Tim. 3:16.

religion texts in general, would be remote or far-fetched for the present chapter of 1 Peter 3, though the “backgrounds” of the cultural and religious convergence in the history of ideas undergird its Christianization. The consideration of a plurality of contributing factors is to free the discussions of Christ’s descent from the necessity of reaching one alleged source for the concept. For better understanding of the Petrine passage, it is necessary to look at the Jewish esoteric traditions of apocalypticism and mysticism at the turn of the era, and also survey how the Sethian Gnostics in the Nag Hammadi texts configure the descent myth in their water baptism. If Sethian Gnosticism existed prior to Christianity, the similar theological and mythical configuration of the redeemer’s descent for the harrowing of Hades in the context of baptism could be an interesting contact point between the Petrine tradition and Sethian Gnosticism.

Christ’s Descent to Hades as an Otherworldly Journey:

Jewish Apocalypticism and Merkavah Mysticism

The recurring pattern of sin, judgment, and restoration/salvation in the mythic past has precipitated the apocalyptic hope of the Jews since the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E.³ In a time of despair and persecution, the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation react to the historical events and suggest an alternative to the historical disorder by way of “historical

³ The pattern has been noted from the events of Sodom/Gomorrah, the flood of Noah by the New Testament writers.

apocalypse.”⁴ 1 Peter, however, reacts to the surrounding Gentile society, rather than to specific historical events. Thus, it provides a “symbolic universe”⁵ by living out the Christian faith as “strangers” or “exiles.” Living out the hope by imagining a transcendent world is grounded on Christ’s secret journey to the underworld, just as the elected righteous community of *I Enoch* bases their secret or mantic wisdom of living out righteousness on Enoch’s journey to heaven and the ends of the earth.

The author of 1 Peter states the eschatological status of the present believers in terms of the old prophets’ dependence on the *Pneuma Christou* (1:11), concerning “salvation” and its time. In line with Jewish apocalypticism and mysticism, the author stresses the coming of the revelatory “things into which even angels long to look” (1:12). This indicates the time of the Messianic age, *καίρος*. Jewish apocalypticism and Merkavah mysticism with esoteric elements that await the Messianic age appear to be inherited in Christian apocalypticism that looks forward to the eschatological realization in the coming of Christ. The esoteric knowledge that is only given to the inner group of the elect is stressed as “gnosis” to bring salvation.

What is important for the immediate context of 1 Peter is related to the Jewish literary and theological development and its religious worldview developed

⁴ John J. Collins, “The Apocalyptic Context of Christian Origins,” *Michigan Quarterly Review* 22/3 (1983): 259.

⁵ The term has been suggested by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 113-14, which argues that a “symbolic universe” provides members with the integrative purpose and function of legitimation by which they have their biography as ordered and integrated in the past, present and future.

before the Christian era, because the author of 1 Peter knows and elaborates the Jewish traditions from the biblical and extra-biblical literature prior to his time. The Jewish context in particular is important in understanding the myth of Christ's descent. In a time of despair, 1 Peter provides an alternative to the disorder of the present by imagining the cosmology of a transcendent world.

Jewish Apocalypticism (*1 Enoch*): The Hope in God's Judgment

The idea of Christ's descent into Hades might well develop from the Jewish literary and theological setting. This setting is not simply placed within the biblical traditions of the Hebrew Bible. Rather, the picture of Judaism has undergone many changes since the conquest of the East by Alexander of Macedon and the emergence of Hellenism in the land of Palestine. As M. E. Stone points out, its picture differs considerably from what can be constructed from the period down to the age of Ezra and Nehemiah.⁶ Quite a new form of religious writings or new perspective on the world appeared and developed, following on the biblical traditions such as prophecy, wisdom, and law. Such literature or genre emerging before the Christian era is called "apocalypse"⁷ or "apocalypticism."

⁶ Michael E. Stone, "The Book of Enoch and Judaism in the Third Century B.C.E.," *CBQ* 40 (1978): 479.

⁷ For the definition of "apocalypse," see John J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14 (1979): 9, defines that "apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world." See also his book, *Daniel, with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 1-24; *idem*, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids:

The dominant worldview of human history is defined as “apocalyptic eschatology.”⁸ This religious innovation in the history of ideas seems to have influenced the apocalypticism of the New Testament writings, coinciding with the emergence of the idea of “salvation history” which presupposes the existence of evil and the “eschaton” of history, under the influence of Zoroastrian dualism.⁹

The Jewish apocalyptic literary setting provides the author of 1 Peter with the background of the Petrine apocalyptic eschatology. The author of 1 Peter admonishes his audience that “a salvation (σωτηρία) is ready to be revealed in the last time” (καίρῳ ἐσχάτῳ) (1:5). He stresses that “Christ was revealed at the end of the ages” (ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τῶν χρόνων) (1:20). The imminent apocalyptic eschatology is the theological framework of 1 Peter, when the author considers that the end of all things is “near” (4:7), the “fiery ordeal” is taking place, and God’s judgment has come by beginning with the house of God (4:12-17). Distinctively, this epistle takes on the characteristic content of “apocalypse,”

Eerdmans, 1998), 1-14.

⁸ Even though there have been a confusion among terms, it is customary to distinguish between ‘apocalypse’ as a literary genre, ‘apocalyptic eschatology’ as a religious perspective and structure of thought, and ‘apocalypticism’ as a sociological ideology. See John J. Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 1-20. For the definition of “eschatology,” see his dictionary article on “Eschatology,” in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman et al., vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 575-609. The term “eschatology” has been prominent in theological discourse, rather than in biblical text itself, though it signifies the teaching about the “last things,” deriving from a Greek term (*eschatos*), and yet has a widely different meaning. John D. Crossan maintains that the term “eschatology” should be used as a genus-level term and place so that, to avoid “terminological confusion,” the diverse mode of world-negation (his definition of eschatology) is represented in such a future, apocalyptic, present, realized, or any other type of eschatology (species-level), see “Apocalyptic and Ascetical Eschatology” in *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 257-71.

⁹ Riley, *One Jesus, Many Christs*, 28, 81.

involving some form of final judgment as well as “eschatological salvation.”¹⁰

This apocalyptic eschatology is shared with *1 Enoch*,¹¹ among Jewish extra-biblical literature before the Christian era, in which the apocalyptic drama culminates in the end of history.¹²

The Jewish apocalypse, which finds its apocalyptic or “proto-apocalyptic” in Isaianic apocalypse (Isa. 24-27),¹³ the book of Zechariah, the book of Daniel,¹⁴ builds its worldview on a different type of future hope, compared with the pre-exilic prophets.¹⁵ The extra-biblical literature of the period between the Hebrew

¹⁰ In 1 Pet. 1:10-12, the author of 1 Peter explains to the audience that “the time” “the circumstance” and “the things” around the appearance of Christ and the sufferings of Christians were prophesied by the prophets as “salvation,” or “good news” into which angels long to look.

¹¹ It is generally recognized that *1 Enoch* is the product of a very long process of translation, compilation and redaction during the period between the 3rd century B.C.E. and the 1st century C.E. The complete main parts of Enoch survive only in Ethiopic, known as *1 Enoch*, which was presumably translated from a Greek version. See James H. Charlesworth, ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:5-12; George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1-36; 81-108* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 1-125.

¹² Professor Sweeney comments that apocalyptic literature is not always concerned with the end of history, but rather it reflects the actual political events to engage the change of history. Though it concerns the heavenly realm beyond human history, its mythological imagery is based on the Jerusalem Temple system that is considered as the center of the cosmos and Judaism. See his article “The End of Eschatology in Daniel? Theological and Socio-Political Ramifications of the Changing Contexts of Interpretation,” *Biblical Interpretation* 9/2 (2001): 123-40.

¹³ Marvin A. Sweeney, “Textual Citations in Isaiah 24-27: Toward an Understanding of the Redactional Function of Chapters 24-27 in the Book of Isaiah,” *JBL* 107/1 (1988): 39-52, argues that the so-called Isaiah Apocalypse draws on a number of texts from the book of Isaiah and other prophetic texts by redacting them to provide the universal significance of the judgment of the nations and the restoration of Israel, regardless of their prior Isaianic contexts.

¹⁴ Sweeney, “The End of Eschatology in Daniel?,” maintains that this apocalyptic literature owes its symbol and imagery to the priestly traditions such as the temple structure and priestly practices.

¹⁵ John J. Collins, “Apocalyptic Eschatology as the Transcendence of Death,” *CBQ* 36 (1974): 21-43, maintains that the later type of future hope which emerged after the prophetic period focuses on the “end of the world” or the transition from an age of old

Bible and the New Testament demonstrates the emergence of the apocalyptic literature since the Second Temple period. The Aramaic fragments of *1 Enoch* found in the Qumran cave¹⁶ shows that the Enochic tradition had been long since developed, depending on the exegetical and mystical summary of Enoch's life in Gen. 5:24 ("Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him."). Enoch's ascent to heaven and journey to the ends of earth are included in the so-called "Book of the Watchers" (*1 Enoch* 1-36).

This book is closely related to another cryptic biblical passage, Gen. 6:1-4, which describes the descent of the sons of God (בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים) who take women on the earth as their wives. The scene of the fallen angels provides the setting for Enoch's tours in this book and functions as the "tour apocalypse"¹⁷ in which the punishment of the fallen angels and the secrets of creation are revealed to the mystic hero, Enoch, who became the first biblical hero of revelatory journey.

The contents and traditions of Enoch have been known to the writers of the New

to the new age, though this old scholarly definition of the characteristics of apocalyptic eschatology (Wellhausen, Vriezen, Mowinckel) is not a fully successful formulation in defining apocalyptic eschatology.

¹⁶ See Józef T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976). The Qumran discovery has the fragments of only four sections of *1 Enoch*, i.e., the Book of the Watchers, the Astronomical Books, the Book of Dreams, the Epistle of Enoch, but no section on the Parables of Enoch (chs. 37-71) which was probably added and edited by the Christian group. Instead of this section, the Qumran community preserved the Book of Giants.

¹⁷ Martha Himmelfarb, "From Prophecy to Apocalypse: The Book of the Watchers and Tours of Heaven," in *Jewish Spirituality*, vol. 1, *From the Bible through the Middle Ages*, ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1986), 146-47. She argues that the tour apocalypses, appeared in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the *Testament of Abraham*, the *Testament of Levi*, the *Apocalypse of Levi*, the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* are concerned with subjects of the "Book of Watchers" and that the tour apocalypse is rarely concerned with the imminent apocalyptic eschatology which is an important subject in many later apocalyptic literature.

Testament and early Jewish and Christian literature.¹⁸ It seems likely that the use of *1 Enoch* by the New Testament authors is due to its picture of the angelic sin and continuing power behind the Gentile world and the eschatological judgment of the angels and individuals, whose traditions are collected and elaborated finally as the form of the Enochic corpus.

The Book of the Watchers, which is the earliest section of *1 Enoch*, includes the fall of angels and their punishment to explain the origin of sin and a Jewish view on the present world and the future judgment of God, based on the mythic past.¹⁹ The emergence of apocalypse can be understood as the reaction to the frustration of restoration eschatology (the absence of Davidic monarchy in the Persian and Hellenistic period) which is dominant in the prophetic traditions. The evil and polluted world that is dominated by the Gentiles is considered as the place behind which the fallen angels stand. *1 Enoch* sees the worldly rulers as the agents of the celestial angelic powers. Thus the judgment of the fallen angels is considered to be a testimony to “the kings and the mighty” (67.12).²⁰ Those Gentile rulers are regarded as the earthly counterpart of the celestial angelic

¹⁸ *Sirach* 44:16; *Jubilees* 4.16-26; *Test. of Jude* 18.1; *Test. of Reuben* 5; *2 Baruch* 56.10-16; *Epistle of Barnabas* 4.3, 16.5; Justin Martyr *2 Apology* 5; Irenaeus, *Ad. haer* 1.15.6, 4.16.2; Clement, *Stromateis* 3.9. The strong allusions to *1 Enoch* are seen in Mt 25:41, 2 Pet. 2:3-5, 9f, Jude 6, 14f, Rev. 12:3-9. Some gnostic documents in the Nag Hammadi Library also show the allusions to the Watcher myth. See the *Apocryphon of John* (NHC II, 1, 28.32-30.11), *A Valentinian Exposition* (XI, 2, 38.22-37), the *Testimony of Truth* (IX, 3, 40.30-41.4), and *On the Origin of the World* (II, 5, 105.14-16; 123.4-13).

¹⁹ Gen. 6:1-4 might allude to the old tradition of the explanation of evil, just as the Book of the Watchers depends on the early Jewish tradition, rather than an exegetical development of the Genesis story.

²⁰ The phrase, “the kings and the mighty,” is seen in *1 Enoch* 54.1-55.4; 61; 62.1-9; 63.1; 67.8-rulers' doom (Ps. 72:10; Mic. 7:16, Rev. 6:10; 17:2, *1 Enoch* 67.4-69.1). The book of Revelation sees the Roman Empire and its rulers as the agent of Satan and the spiritual powers, by symbolizing it as the woman and the sea-dragon. The city of Rome as Babylon is expressed as a dwelling place for demons (Rev. 18:2).

powers who are the enemy of God because they are closely connected by spiritual warfare. The heathen world's ruling over the world is symbolized as "70 shepherds" in *1 Enoch* 90.22. The future judgment on the celestial angels and the earthly rulers is already seen in the book of Isaiah:

On that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven in heaven, and on earth the kings of the earth. They will be gathered together like prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished. Then the moon will be abashed, and the sun ashamed; for the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before his elders he will manifest his glory. (24:21-23)

1 Enoch's worldview is that the devilish Gentile world is under the power of the fallen angels, even though they existed before the Flood.²¹ The *Book of Jubilees* also shares this view of the world as under the demonic powers that are described as Mastema, Satan, or Belial.

According to Collins, the story of the Watchers provides a "mythic paradigm"²² which illustrates a type of situation that can recur at various times, because the condition of the Jews under Hellenistic rule in the second century B.C.E., or even since the conquest of Alexander, produces the Jewish apocalypse in which the contemporary situations are allegorized as if they were in the mythic past. This mythic paradigm reflects the eschatology of the *dramatis personae*²³

²¹ Bo Ivar Reicke, *The Disobedient Spirit and Christian Baptism: A Study of 1 Peter 3.19 and Its Context* (Kobenhavn: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1946), 52-91. See angelic imprisonment in *1 Enoch* 10.4, 12, 14, 13.1, 18.16, 21.3, 6.

²² Collins, "Apocalyptic Context of Christian Origins," 253, maintains that the problem of the Hellenistic age is the actualization of the mythic paradigm.

²³ Willem S. Vorster, "1 Enoch and the Jewish Literary Setting for the New Testament: A Study in Text Types," in *Studies in 1 Enoch and the New Testament* (Stellenbosch, South Africa: University of Stellenbosch, 1983), 7.

between God, the angels of God, and the “elect”²⁴ on the one hand, and Azazel, the chief of the fallen angels, the rebellious angels, and the earthly kings and the mighty on the other.

The ultimate defeat of the fallen angels is predestined by way of their immediate imprisonment and the future judgment of God as to their fates. The judgment of the Flood was a sign of God’s judgment on the fallen angels and the wicked human beings. The theological paradigm of sin-judgment-salvation is based on the inseparable sinners between angels, “giants,”²⁵ and human transgressors from the ante-Diluvian time. These great associated transgressors before God resulted in the judgment of the Noachic Flood. The evil spirits or demons, however, originating from the dead giants who are the offspring of the fallen angels and earthly women, still remain as the continued existence of evil on the earth (*1 Enoch* 16.1).²⁶

The New Testament writers use as the “prototype of something in the present” the theological alignment of the sins of the beings (angels and humans) before the Flood and their judgments by way of the angelic imprisonment and the flooding on the earth.²⁷ The theological alignment sometimes includes the events

²⁴ The term, “elect” is important for both *1 Enoch* (1.8; 38.1ff) and 1 Peter (1:1-13), which designates the recipient or audience.

²⁵ The giants (γίγαντες) is a Greek translation of the Hebrew term גִּבּוֹרִים in Gen. 6:4. They are explained as the offspring of the sons of God and earthly women. The LXX also translates עֲנָקִים as γίγαντες in Deut. 1:28.

²⁶ In *Jubilees* 10.5ff, after the Flood, Noah interceded for his children who after the Flood began to be attacked by the evil spirits. But Mastema, the chief spirit, asked God for the continued existence of his fellow evil spirits so that they continue to corrupt and lead people astray. Thus God permitted one-tenth of the spirits to stay with Mastema on the earth until the last judgment.

²⁷ Reicke, 74. He explains that the “prototype is a pedagogic illustration” and “has a

of Sodom and Gomorrah in its theological paradigm of sin-judgment-salvation in the New Testament:²⁸

For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of deepest darkness to be kept until the judgment; and if he did not spare the ancient world, even though he saved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood on a world of the ungodly; and if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction¹ and made them an example of what is coming to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man greatly distressed by the licentiousness of the lawless (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by their lawless deeds that he saw and heard), then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment. (2 Pet. 2:4-9)

And the angels who did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great Day. Likewise, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner as they, indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural lust, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire. (Jude 6-7)

But first he must endure much suffering and be rejected by this generation. Just as it was in the days of Noah, so too it will be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking, and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed all of them. Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot: they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day that Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and sulfur from heaven and destroyed all of them - it will be like that on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. (Lk 17: 25-30; cf. Mt 24:37-39)

The authors of these NT writings compare the days of the Son of Man and the following Christian generation with the judgment days of ancient angels,

much more active function as a principle, origin, father, authority and protector in relation to the present day counterpart." For example, the beings punished at the Flood can be conceived as a "type" of a certain beings in the present.

²⁸ In the following NT texts, the bold-type words indicate the Jewish theological paradigm of the sin-judgment-salvation related with the mythic past.

the Flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah. The mythical past is used as a proto-type to describe the present wicked generation in which the godly are suffering in the surrounding Gentile society. The elected righteous are exhorted to endure the sufferings and persecutions from outside and wait for the final judgment of God over the source of evil (angels) and the wicked generation. Although the authors of the Gospels or Q do not explicitly mention the sinning of the angels in the mythic past before the Flood, Matthew presupposes the knowledge of this myth, when he expects God's final judgment over the angels:

Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." (Mt 25:41)²⁹

More explicitly than the Gospels, the so-called General Epistles express the knowledge of the Watcher myth and its eschatological tenor. This Jewish worldview, based on the theological alignment of the Watcher myth-the judgment of the Flood-Sodom/Gomorrah-the present wicked generation, is also reflected in several Jewish writings outside the canon:

In an assembly of sinners a fire is kindled, and in a disobedient nation wrath blazes up. He did not forgive the ancient giants who revolted in their might. He did not spare the neighbors of Lot, whom he loathed on account of their arrogance. (Sirach 16:6-8)

When the earth was flooded because of him, wisdom again saved it, steering the righteous man by a paltry piece of wood. Wisdom also, when the nations in wicked agreement had been put to confusion, recognized the righteous man and preserved him blameless before God, and kept him strong in the face of his compassion for his child. Wisdom rescued a righteous man when the ungodly were perishing; he escaped the fire that descended on the Five Cities. (Wisdom 10:4-6)

²⁹ See *1 Enoch* 10.12 for the fate of Azazel.

For you, the creator of all things and the governor of all, are a just Ruler, and you judge those who have done anything in insolence and arrogance. You destroyed those who in the past committed injustice, among whom were even giants who trusted in their strength and boldness, whom you destroyed by bringing on them a boundless flood. You consumed with fire and sulfur the people of Sodom who acted arrogantly, who were notorious for their vices; and you made them an example to those who should come afterward. (3 *Macc.* 2:3-5)

The prototype of the mythic past for the present and future generations is considered as setting up a “example” (ὑπόδειγμα, παράδειγμα, δέιγμα)³⁰ of the judgment over the ungodly and the lesson of the future generation (2 Pet. 2:6; Jude 1:7; 3 *Macc.* 2:5). The function of “example” is based on the theological alignment between the mythical past and the present situation in the paradigm of sin-judgment-salvation. 1 Peter 3:21 indicates this theological motif of the old Jewish tradition from its explicit term, “antitype” (ἀντίτυπος). In later Jewish gnostic development, the eschatological character of the mythical past (Noah-Sodom/Gomorrah-the end of time) periodizes the pattern of sin-punishment-salvation, according to the distinctive judgments of water and fire.³¹

In summary, the Enochic corpus, especially in the “Book of the Watchers,” provides an important perspective for understanding 1 Peter’s apocalyptic eschatology, which has been preserved in the old Jewish apocalyptic materials

³⁰ Sirach 44:16ff demonstrates that Enoch became “an example or sign (ὑπόδειγμα) of repentance of all generations” (“a sign of knowledge for generation after generation,” in Manuscript B⁶), when he pleased the Lord and was taken up. As for Ben Sirach’s praise of the ancestors (chs. 44-50), Enoch is the key person with whom the salvation history of Israel begins and ends. See James C. VanderKam, *Enoch: A Man for All Generations* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 104-7.

³¹ PHEME PERKINS, “Apocalypse of Adam: the Genre and Function of a Gnostic Apocalypse,” *CBQ* 39 (1977): 387-89, argues that the threefold descent or *parousia* of the redeemer figure is actualized through “the tripartite periodization of history, revelation, or judgment.”

which reveal the Jewish worldview regarding the surrounding Hellenistic society. The fallen angels are in back of the Greco-Roman world whose Gentile rulers and people are the spiritual enemies of the elected righteous.³² The final victory over them is predestined, as *1 Enoch* indicates that the places of reward and punishment are already prepared. In this apocalyptic context, 1 Peter takes the descent of Christ into Hades as an important realization of its apocalyptic expectation, which appears to be cryptic.

Merkavah Mysticism: Descent to the Merkavah in the Liturgical Use

Within the prophetic tradition, the visionary character of the divine and heavenly realm begins with Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1. This visionary experience of the heavenly throne continued in a way of the heavenly ascent in *1 Enoch* 14 and the earliest body of Jewish mystical texts,³³ the Hekhalot and Merkavah books of the mid-first millennium C.E.³⁴ In *1 Enoch*, Enoch's translation into the divine Godhead or Throne is taken for the sake of the Watchers' petitions (chs. 12-16), following on the story of the angels' fall and their punishment (chs. 6-11).

³² This perspective that behind the struggles of the Hellenistic rulers lies the ongoing battle of the angels who are the princes (רָשָׁיִם) of the nations is viewed in Daniel 10-12. See Collins, "Apocalyptic Context of Christian Origins," 257.

³³ See *Apocalypse of Abraham* 15-20; *Testament of Levi* 2.6-5.3; *Ascension of Isaiah* 6-11.

³⁴ Michael E. Stone, "The Book of Enoch and Judaism in the Third Century B.C.E., *CBQ* 40 (1978): 488. Scholem and Gruenwald argue that the Talmudic references to *Maaseh Merkavah* indicate the existence of an esoteric tradition within first- and second-century rabbinism. See Gershom. G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 3rd ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1954), 40-79; Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1980).

Ensuing from this ascent, Enoch makes a journey to the underworld and the ends of the world (chs. 17-36). This ascent vision appears to develop from the early visionary experience of the biblical prophetic tradition, as in Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1.

Scholem argues that Jewish mysticism related with the “heroes of mystical action” could be traceable in the connections between the group who produced a large portion of the Jewish pseudepigrapha and apocalypses, around the turn of the Christian era, and later Jewish mystic texts.³⁵ The particular form of Jewish mysticism developed among the teachers of the Mishnah who belonged to a group of pupils of Johanan ben Zakkai in the first century C.E.³⁶ The earliest Jewish mysticism is called “Merkavah (throne) mysticism” which was speculated on by the Mishnaic teachers. According to Scholem, the first stage of this mysticism is found in the anonymous conventicles of the old apocalypses.³⁷ The later development of Merkavah mysticism centers on the contemplation of God (theosophic speculation).³⁸ Scholem maintains that the world of the Merkavah is

³⁵ Scholem, *Major Trends*, 42.

³⁶ Ibid. Scholem indicates that a good deal of this “unrecognized tradition” made its way to later generations, independent of, and often in isolation from, the schools and academics of the Talmudic teachers.

³⁷ Ibid., 43-44. He argues that certain apocryphal works such as *1 Enoch* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* share similar themes with the esoteric doctrine of the Mishnah. The old prophetic vision of Ezekiel 1 and the throne vision of *1 Enoch* 14 are developed in this Merkavah mysticism in the early and later rabbinic period.

³⁸ Scholem, *Major Trends*, 46. This theosophic speculation is about “God’s glory,” “understanding of the glory,” or “employment of the Glory.” The Hekhalot literature (היכלות זוטרת and היכלות רבתי) finds this theosophic speculation in the “sphere of the throne” which has its “chambers” or “palaces” (*hekhaloth*). It seems to me that the theosophic speculation was influenced by early pre-Christian Gnosticism in which the sphere of “pleroma” could be identified with the throne world. Gnostic theosophic speculation was noted in Irenaeus’ *Ad. haer* 2.28.9 where some Gnostics maintain that

closely connected with the *Pleroma* ("fullness") of the Greek gnostic texts.³⁹ In a conclusive argument, he finds the important driving force of the development of Merkavah mysticism in "apocalyptic nostalgia:"

It is safe to say that what might be termed *apocalyptic nostalgia* was among the most powerful motive-forces of the whole Merkavah mysticism. The attitude of these mystics towards the reality of history is even more pointedly negative than that of the contemporary Jewish theologians, the Aggadists. The depressing conditions of the period, the beginning of the era of persecution by the Church since the fourth century, directed the religious interests of the mystics towards the higher world of the Merkavah; from the world of history the mystic turns to the prehistoric period of creation, from whose vision he seeks consolation, or towards the post-history of redemption.⁴⁰

Classical rabbinic literature makes it clear that there was an esoteric doctrine in Talmudic Judaism that demonstrates two categories of Jewish mysticism, *Maaseh Bereshit* and *Maaseh Merkavah*.⁴¹ The Talmudic reference to the account of Merkavah mysticism indicates some old traditions related with the ascent to heaven or the vision of the heavenly throne and demonstrates the existence of an esoteric tradition within the environment of the first-and second-century early

they have searched out the "deep things" (*altitudines*, βάθος) of God (Job 11:7; 1 Cor. 2:10). The book of Revelation demonizes this gnostic theosophic speculation as the "deep things of Satan" (2:24).

³⁹ Gershom G. Scholem, *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1962), 19, argues for the gnostic elements of Merkavah mysticism.

⁴⁰ Scholem, *Major Trends*, 72-73.

⁴¹ See, P. Alexander, "A New Translation and Introduction" in the section of 3 *Enoch* in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:229-39. The most extensive single text in classical rabbinic literature, *Hagigah* 11b-16a gives an account of the seven heavens and their contents. In *Hag.14b*, the story of four scholars' entering *Pardes* indicates the popular motif of the mystical ascent to heaven or paradise in Talmudic times. The Mishnah rules that "*Maaseh Beresit* (the Account of Creation) may not be expounded before two or more persons, not the Chariot before even one, unless he is a scholar who understands of his own knowledge" (*Hagigah* 2.1).

rabbinism,⁴² though the early rabbinic leading teachers who influenced the development of later rabbinic orthodoxy repressed this ideas of the mystic circle.⁴³

The writings of the Hekhalot literature under the name of such authentic personages as Johanan ben Zakkai, Akiba ben Joseph, and Ishmael the High Priest might reflect the political and social turmoil in the Jewish revolt against the Roman imperial ruling over the land of Israel, similar to that of the Maccabean era. While Jewish apocalypticism focuses on the secrets that present history as having eschatological direction, Merkavah mysticism concerns itself with the secrets of the divinity.⁴⁴

The latter Jewish esoteric tradition also involves the angelic transformation of the visionary or mystic.⁴⁵ The visionary mystic who ascends to heaven to see the throne room, after his or her transformation into angel or fire, comes to have such a goal of the mythical experience. The transformation of the visionary into an angelic being is found in such apocalyptic literature as *1 Enoch* 71, *2 Enoch* 22, the *Testament of Levi* 8, and the *Ascension of Isaiah* 9. This leads to the

⁴² Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones, "Transformational Mysticism in the Apocalyptic-Merkavah Tradition," *JJS* (1992): 1, asserts that this mysticism was inherited from apocalyptic circles, and enthusiastically developed by some Tannaim. The early development of Merkavah mysticism in early rabbinism is argued by Scholem, *Major Trends*, 40-79; *idem*, *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala*, 15-20; Ithamar Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism: Studies in Apocalypticism, Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1988).

⁴³ Hugo Odeberg, *The Fourth Gospel: Interpreted in Its Relation to Contemporaneous Religious Currents in Palestine and the Hellenistic-Oriental World* (Chicago: Argonaut, 1968), 205. First published in Uppsala, 1929.

⁴⁴ Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, 53.

⁴⁵ Morray-Jones, 22-31, argues that Enoch's transformation into Metatron in *3 Enoch* and the rabbinic stories of Moses' *metamorphosis* are the examples of the ultimate aspiration of the Merkavah mystic. Segal maintains that "becoming angels" (stars) is one aspect of the life after death, developed in the book of Daniel (12:3) and demonstrated in "angelomorphism" at Qumran; see his book, *Life After Death*, 285-308.

rabbinical Merkavah speculations. The intermediary stage of the transformation of the ascending heroes during their lifetime in apocalyptic literature develops into a later stage of “transformational mysticism,” found in the mystic heavenly figure of “Metatron” who is extremely important in Jewish esoteric literature, which represents the celestial angelic being as the transformed visionary.

In *3 Enoch* 7-15, Enoch ascends into heaven and is transformed into an angel, who used to sit upon a throne before the throne of glory. This figure is one form of the hypostatized Glory (*kabod*) who acts as the intermediary, “the lesser YHWH” (12.5), who is not only taught and revealed all secrets and all works by the Holy One (11.1-3), but also receives the authority of judgment (16.1-2).⁴⁶ If the mythical tradition of the angelic transformation of the ascending hero such as Enoch, Moses, or the righteous mystic is old and widespread in the first centuries in the esoteric Jewish circles, the concept of ascending to heaven in visionary experience is not simply future apocalyptic expectation, but rather the present visionary experience which will attain the mystical hope and goal to reach the throne of glory.

The mystical experience of the heavenly ascensions described in the Hekhalot literature includes the description of the passage through the seven gates

⁴⁶ For the study of Metatron, see Matthew Black, “The Origin of the Name Metatron,” *VT* 1/3 (1951): 217-19; Saul Lieberman, “Metatron, the Meaning of His Name and His Functions,” attached as “Appendices” in Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, 235-41; Gedaliahu A. G. Stroumsa, “Forms of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ,” *HTR* 76 (1983): 269-88; David J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1988), 402-37; Odeberg, *Fourth Gospel*, 46-47, 204-7. For the text of *3 Enoch*, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:255-315. The Babylonian Talmud, *Hagigah* 15a explains that Metatron was permitted to sit in the presence of God so that he could perform his scribal duties. *1 Enoch* 15.1 and *Jubilees* 4.23 see Enoch as “the great Scribe of righteousness” who records humans’ deeds and reveals the heavenly secrets.

leading into the seven “palaces” (hekhalot) of the hosts of the angels, and of angelic songs, or liturgy. This heavenly ascension shares the same religious idea with the gnostic ascent of the soul through the seven heavens, which would indicate that the Hekhalot literature is a Jewish version of Gnosticism around the Christian era. The main object of the mystic is to “see the King in his beauty” (לראות מלך ביופיו), or “to contemplate the Merkavah” (להסתכל במרכבה).⁴⁷

The technical term used by the Merkavah mystics is “descending to the Merkavah” (ירד למרכבה). Scholem points out that the visionary journey to heaven is paradoxically called “descent to the Merkavah,” while the detailed description of the mystical experience consistently employs the metaphor of the ascent, and the mystics of the Hekhalot literature are known as the “descenders to the Merkavah” (*Yordei Merkavah*).⁴⁸ He argues that this term might come from the influence of the Talmudic phrase, יורד לפני התבה (“descender to the presence of the Ark”) for prayer, since the Ark containing the scrolls of the Torah is like the throne.⁴⁹ Gruenwald advances Scholem’s hypothesis in that the simple reason for creation of this term is that the person called *Yordei LaMerkavah* is “a kind of public emissary who functions as a medium entering into a mystical trance on

⁴⁷ Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, 107.

⁴⁸ Scholem, *Major Trends*, 47. This term is first used in the *Hekhalot Rabbati* and is not to be found outside of it. Cf. Mack, “Christ and Jewish Wisdom,” 202, interestingly points out that the metaphor of “descent” or “ascent” from the wisdom myth lies in whether or not the sages believe in the possibility of the presence of wisdom in the world as her dwelling place.

⁴⁹ Gershom G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah, Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960), 1 n, 20.

behalf of the fellow mystics or group.”⁵⁰

According to the *Hekhalot Rabbati*, a ceremony is described in which someone descends to the Merkavah, and later on raised as a representative, acting on behalf of a group:

And since R. Nehuniah ben Haqanah saw this edict, he made me stand up, and made me *descend to the Merkavah*, and I [R. Ishmael] asked a question of Suriah. (*Hekhalot Rabbati* iv, 4)

R. Ishmael said: the whole group said to me: you who have special distinctions, and you who rule in the great light, in the light of the Torah, as does R. Nehuniah ben Haqanah, show him and bring him back and he shall sit with us and relate to us of the vision of the Merkavah, etc. (*Hekhalot Rabbati* xviii, 1)⁵¹

In *Hekhalot Rabbati* xviii, 4, R. Nehuniah answers the question by the Havurah (the mystical group) of who those *Yordei Merkavah* are, saying to them,

“These are the people that the *Yordei Merkavah* used to take and place above themselves,” saying to them: Look and see, listen and write down all that we say and hear in front of the Throne of Glory.

R. Nehuniah acts as a medium by explaining the mystical affairs of the descent and ascent of the Merkavah on behalf of the mystics (*Hekhalot Rabbati* xiv, 3). This medium functions as the receiver of the divine words and at the same time as the intermediary for a congregation, like *Yored Lifne HaTeivah*.⁵²

Merkavah mysticism, based on the old apocalyptic materials of the throne world, seems to have developed, just as Jewish Gnosticism before Christianity

⁵⁰ Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, chapter 5, “Appendix: The Meaning of the Term ‘Yordei Merkavah,’” 170-73.

⁵¹ Another descent to the Merkavah is made by R. Akiba; see, iv, 3: R. Ishmael said, “R. Akiba learnt all these songs in front of the throne of glory on his descent [unto the Merkavah].”

⁵² Gruenwald, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, 173.

evolved in the Hellenistic age. When Jewish spirituality within rabbinic Judaism related with apocalypticism begins to speculate on the throne world which has been seen in the visionary experience of the canonical prophets like Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1, the goal or purpose of its spirituality is to reach the throne world by way of the transformation of the mystics into the heavenly beings. The descent into the Merkavah as the paradoxical expression of the heavenly ascent might be the Jewish response to the popular idea of the journey of the soul whose immortality is achieved when it returns to the intelligible world, by preserving the Jewish monotheistic tradition of God the Creator.⁵³

The Jewish concept of the descent to the otherworld might be one factor contributing to the development of Christ's descent. More relevantly, Merkavah mysticism developed according to its liturgical use in that the absence of the Temple system leads the mystics to emphasize the observance of the Torah that is embedded in the Jewish liturgy.⁵⁴ The liturgical conceptualization of the descent to the Throne could be in line with 1 Peter's baptismal conceptualization of Christ's descent in the baptismal rite.

⁵³ *Hagigah* 2.1 denies the gnostic questions: "Whosoever give his mind to four things it were better for him if he had not come into the world- what is above? What is beneath? What was before time? And what will be hereafter?" This text comes from Herbert Danby, trans., *The Mishnah* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 213.

⁵⁴ From the class lecture of HB 317 "Visionary and Mystics in Jewish Literature" in 2005, Professor Sweeney argues that the issue of "no Temple" and theodicy in the Hekhalot literature is dealt by emphasizing the full observance of the Torah and the Mishnah in the presence of God by its liturgical use. See *Hekhalot Rabbati* 22.4. The Qumran community deals with this issue of "no Temple" in terms of the angelic liturgy for the heavenly Temple, replacing the earthly Temple (4QSirSabb; 11QMelch).

Conceptualization of the *Descensus* Tradition in the Baptismal Context

Conceptualization for Christ's Redemptive Work

It has been argued that the myth of the descent of Christ was already dominant in the early church fathers in the first and second centuries, even though the idea of the universalistic salvation that welcomed the Petrine passage was later rejected by Augustine.⁵⁵ The very idea of the descent of Christ into Hades, however, is inevitable in its context of the baptismal rite. Bousset observed that Christian belief in the descent of Christ into the underworld represents the assimilation and spiritualization of a much more primitive myth.⁵⁶ This legend is of a heroic redeemer who invades the kingdom of the dead to assert his power over the underworld and its resident deities. The purpose of the heroic descent is to wage war against the powers of the underworld. The *Descensus Christi*, however, was deprived of its mythological features in the Patristic literature of the second and third centuries.⁵⁷ As the text of 1 Peter 3:19 (“preaching to the spirits in prison”- κηρύσσω) and 4:6 (“preaching to the dead”- εὐαγγελίζω) appear to be a Christianizing process of Christ’s mission work in the underworld, the early church fathers such as Ignatius, Justin, Irenaeus, and

⁵⁵ See Reicke, *Disobedient Spirit*, 37-51, on the Augustinian influence on the Catholic and Protestant tradition.

⁵⁶ Wilhelm Bousset, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1907), 244.

⁵⁷ R. Joseph Hoffman, “Confluence in Early Christian and Gnostic Literature—The *Descensus Christi ad Inferos* (*Acta Pilati* XVII-XXVII),” *JSNT* 10 (1981): 42.

Tertullian consider this text as a Christianized myth of the descent, that is, Christ's preaching to the captive patriarchs and prophets who have anticipated Christ's coming to Hades:

The Lord God remembered his dead people of Israel and descended to preach for them that lay in their graves. (Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 72)

The prophets were expecting him as their teacher and for this reason he whom they rightly expected, when he came, raised them from the dead. (Ignatius, *Adv. Mag.* 9)

Christ in Hades underwent the law of human death, nor did he ascend until he had descended to the lower parts of the earth, that he might make the patriarchs and prophets share in his life. (Tertullian, *De anima* 55)

The Christological expression of faith in Christ's redemptive work by way of assimilating and spiritualizing the myth of the descent seems to have given rise to the doctrine of universal salvation in Alexandrian interpretation.⁵⁸ Even before the fathers of Alexandria welcomed the Petrine passage for its universalistic understanding of salvation, the primitive myth of the descent arose independently of 1 Peter 3:19. This fact was recognized in the writings of the early church Fathers. According to Loofs, the conception of the *descensus* current in the early church proceeds on entirely different lines, and arose independently of 1 Peter 3:19f.⁵⁹ Even before Clement and Origen, the descent of Christ, without reference to 1 Peter, is well attested, because, in the popular view, "to die" has been thought to "go to Hades," and from the beginning this belief has been held

⁵⁸ Clement of Alexandria first mentioned that the beneficiaries of Christ's preaching in Hades are the righteous pagans as well as the people of Israel.

⁵⁹ Friedrich Loofs, "Descent to Hades (Christ's)," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1981), 648-63.

about Christ.⁶⁰ When this motif of the *descensus* into the netherworld became a popular motif as a religious and mythical theme, it could easily be adopted and appropriated for Christ's death and his continuing redemptive work.

Many descents in Greek mythology are for the purpose of rescuing from death someone who has recently died.⁶¹ The classic instance is Orpheus' rescue of his wife, Eurydice. The last of the twelve heroic labors commissioned to Heracles according to the command of Eurystheus is that he should descend into Hades to bring to earth the monster-dog Cerberus. These mythical figures and their descents draw the commentators' attention to thinking that the myth of the descent was appropriated and applied to Christ's descent:

The doctrine of the Descent of Christ into Hades, though it has captivated the imagination of many generations and has even found a place in the Creed, belongs to the periphery of Christian teaching, not to the centre – if indeed it can be said to have any legitimate place in Christian teaching at all. It is nothing else than the appropriation, and the application to Christ, of a fragment of the redemption-mythology of the Oriental religions, best known to us in the ancient story of the Descent of Ishtar to the underworld, and reflected also in a number of Greek myths.⁶²

Beare notices only the appropriation and the application of the descent myth for the Christian use, failing to see how the author of 1 Peter conceptualized its myth for Christian baptismal use. Whereas the heroic figures like Heracles,

⁶⁰ Edward G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter: The Greek Text, with Introduction, Notes and Essays* (London: MacMillan, 1947), 340-41.

⁶¹ Bauckham, "Descent to the Underworld," 150.

⁶² Francis W. Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter: The Greek Text, with Introduction and Notes* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1947), 145. Such scholars as Hauck, Knopf, Gunkel, Windisch, Bousset, and Bultmann maintain that the material in the Petrine passage finds its roots in pagan myths of the descent. See John S. Feinberg, "1 Peter 3:18-20, Ancient Mythology, and the Intermediate State," *WTJ* 48 (1986): 312.

Orpheus, and Aeskelpios descended alive to Hades, the descent of Christ is significantly different from the earlier myths of the descent, in that the early church mythologizes the “death of Christ.” Other scholars such as Loofs,⁶³ Clemen,⁶⁴ and MacCulloch⁶⁵ maintain that the *Descensus Christi ad Inferos* is a distinctive Christian doctrine, because it is the result of the union of the supreme Christian fact of Christ’s resurrection with the current Jewish doctrine of life after death (the Essenes’ belief in the bare immortality of the soul and the Pharisees’ claim on a bodily resurrection).⁶⁶

Whether the myth of the *Descensus* stemmed from the pagan myths, or the immediate context of the Judaeo-Christian theology,⁶⁷ the fleshly death of Christ seems to have gone through the process of conceptualization for Christ’s redemptive work in the otherworld. Christ’s proclamation to the disobedient spirits of Noah’s day results from this conceptualization of Christ’s extensive and inclusive ministry after his “fleshly death” which means “going to the realm of

⁶³ He argues that the doctrine in its original form stemmed from Judaeo-Christian sources, but lending itself to the syncretism that later unites to this primitive concept a highly elaborated traditional doctrine; see his article “Christ’s Descent into Hell,” 290 ff.

⁶⁴ Carl Clemen, *Primitive Christianity and Its Non-Jewish Sources*, trans. Robert G. Nisbet (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), 199-200.

⁶⁵ MacCulloch, *Harrowing of Hell*, 312-19.

⁶⁶ According to Josephus, who describes the bodily resurrection through the Greek idea of immortality for his Greco-Roman audience in the *Jewish Wars* 2.154-58, 162-63 and the *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.14, 18 (cf. Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* 9.18-28), both the Essenes and the Pharisees believe in the soul’s immortality in the afterlife, though this is a minority view among the Jews in Palestine, according to G. Riley’s comment. See also William C. Finch, *The Descent into Hades: An Exegetical, Historical, and Theological Study*, Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1940 (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1988), 7-10.

⁶⁷ Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 233-48, argues that the descent into hell was a subject of central importance of Jewish Christianity because they wanted to deal with the matter of the salvation of the righteous who died before Christ.

the dead (Hades)” in the minds of the popular religious people of the day. The motif of the descent is prominent mostly in the gnostic literature, especially in the Nag Hammadi Sethian texts. The theological construction and the conceptualization of the myth in the baptismal context are worthy of comparing with the Petrine passage.

The Sethian Baptismal Context

Quispel argues that it was a Valentinian who collected the nucleus of the heterogeneous writings of Nag Hammadi in Greek, before they were translated into Coptic and copied somewhere near or in the monasteries of Pachomius.⁶⁸ Although this heterogeneity is seen in terms of the myth-making on the *Pleroma* of the aeons and the Sophia, the symbolism of the redemptive work of the savior figure has a common theme by way of the ritual descent (baptism). When the descent of the Sophia figure as the savior is taken into account, its redemptive work is closely related with its waking of the soul from oblivion (forgetfulness).⁶⁹ This saving work of the descent from above is spiritualized and ritualized in the gnostic baptismal rites.

John D. Turner analyzes the literary dependencies and redactional history

⁶⁸ Gilles Quispel, “Valentinian Gnosis and the *Apocryphon of John*,” in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, March 28-31, 1978*, vol. 1, *The School of Valentinus*, ed. Bentley Layton (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 122.

⁶⁹ As Christ’s redemptive work, the *topos* of awakening the sleeping souls is demonstrated in Eph. 5:14 and, in general, in the Gospel of John and the Gospel of Thomas.

of the Sethian gnostic texts from Nag Hammadi, showing how the baptismal tradition of the Sethians in the first century C.E., like Christian and non-Christian baptismal circles, provides the milieu for the earliest Sethian texts.⁷⁰ It is argued that the concluding so-called “Pronoia Hymn” in the longer version of the *Apocryphon of John* (NHC II, 1.30.12-31) is the early evidence of the spiritualized Sethian baptismal rite of the “five seals” before the later Christianized Sethian texts.⁷¹ This text shows that the divine Pronoia descends into “Chaos or Hades”⁷² three times to wake up the sleeping souls from the chains of prison that is identified with Hades:

And I entered into the middle of their prison [Hades] and I said: “I am the Pronoia of the pure light; I am the thinking of the virginal Spirit, he who raised you up to the honored place.” And I raised them up and sealed them in the light of the water with Five Seals in order that death might not have power over them from this time on. (II, 31.11-25)

This hymn is noted for its very close equivalent of the second half of the Naasene Psalm in Hippolytus’ *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*.⁷³

Look Father: this prey (the fallen soul) to evils is wandering away to earth, far from thy Spirit, and she seeks to escape the bitter Chaos but knows not how to win through. For that reason send me, Father. Bearing *Seals* I shall

⁷⁰ John D. Turner, “Sethian Gnosticism: A Literary History,” in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity*, ed., Charles W. Hedrick and Robert Hodgson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), 55-86.

⁷¹ The Christianized Sethian texts of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (NHC XIII, 1.48.31) and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (NHC IV, 56.25-21; III, 55.12, 63.3) refer to the “five seals” of baptism in the living water.

⁷² In the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (NHC III, 56.23-58.22), the 12 angels (aeons) were created to rule over Chaos and Hades by Sakla (the *Demiurgos*), which signifies that the world below the Pleroma is understood to be “Chaos and Hades.” The Chaos also symbolizes the primeval force of the material world in *On the Origin of the World* (NHC II, 5; XIII, 2).

⁷³ Cited in Turner, “Sethian Gnosticism,” 62.

descend; I will pass through all the Aeons; I shall reveal all the mysteries and I shall deliver the secrets of the holy way, calling them Gnosis. (Book 5, 10.2)

The Five Seals appear to signify the baptismal rite of enlightenment (awakening the sleeping souls) for the initiate, which is likely to demonstrate the ritual descent (immersion) into the living water. The mystical descent from above into Chaos or Hades that is symbolized in the water baptism is well attested in the essentially-non Christian gnostic text of *On the Origin of the World* where “three baptisms”(spirit, fire, and water, *NHC* II, 122.14-15) were related to the “baptism of a true man.”⁷⁴

It is manifest that water baptism is used for the gnostic initiates through the descent of Pistis Sophia:

But most of all, the water was purified through the likeness of Pistis Sophia, who had appeared to the prime parent [of chaos, Yaldabaoth] in the waters. Justly, then, it has been said: “through the waters.” The holy water since it vivifies the all, purifies it. (II, 108.28-109.1)

The redemptive descent of Pistis Sophia or Sophia Zoe is involved in her casting out the troublemaker (Yaldabaoth) into Tartaros (102.33) and her eschatological pursuit of the gods of Chaos and casting them down into the Abyss so that they will be obliterated eternally (126.20-22). For the gnostic elect, water baptism

⁷⁴ The text tells us that the mythical animals (phoenixes, water hydri) are witnesses to angels (the former) and a water baptism (the latter), and adds that the Sophia puts her *seal* on her heaven unto eternity. The author here recounts such triads as three types of men (spiritual, soulish, and earthly), three phoenixes, and three baptisms. For the details of the triads of Gnostic systems, see John D. Turner, “The Gnostic Threefold Path to Enlightenment,” *NovT* 22/4 (1980): 324-51.

with Sophia's seals appears to signify the eternal life of the Phoenix of Egypt:

It is written concerning it, "the just man will blossom like a phoenix." And the phoenix first appears in a living state, and dies, and rises again, being a sign of what has become apparent at the consummation of the age. (122.28-33)

Water baptism in the living water signifies the vivification of sleeping souls.

This water baptism of the early Sethian Gnostics is also understood to be the eschatological redemptive work of the Sophia figure, whose descent is to overcome the gods of Chaos and their prime parent (Yaldabaoth), who are identified as the underworld figures (Tartaros, Chaos, Abyss).

In another non-Christian Sethian text of the *Apocalypse of Adam*,⁷⁵ it is noted that the threefold descent of the redeemer (Illuminator), to save the souls under the power of death, is contrasted with the thirteen false or inadequate explanations of his origin.⁷⁶ It is likely that the thirteen kingdoms' proclamation on the origin of the Illuminator is a catechism before water baptism, because each stanza ends with "and thus he came to water."⁷⁷ This text appears to explicitly

⁷⁵ Douglas M. Parrott, "The 13 Kingdoms of the *Apocalypse of Adam*: Origin, Meaning and Significance," *NovT* 31/1 (1989): 3 n, 68, lists the scholars who argued for Christian influence on this tractate in spite of its slighness, and those who see no Christian elements.

⁷⁶ George W. MacRae, section on the *Apocalypse of Adams* in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 277. Charles W. Hedrick, *The Apocalypse of Adam* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980), 139-40, argues that 13 kingdoms might be related to "the god of the 13 aeons" in the Sethian gnostic *Gospel of the Egyptians* (NHC III, 63, 16-18) and believes that the number refers to the "total of the seven kings appointed over the seven heavens and the five kings appointed over the abyss, plus the first archon, Yaldabaoth (or Sakla) (*Ap. John* II, 11.4-7; 10.19-25; 11.11-22).

⁷⁷ The third person singular is cryptic in each phrase. But if it is provided in the context of the water baptism, the person referred to seems to be the person who is to be baptized after the catechism.

emphasize the importance of the “holy baptism” in the living water with the triple mythical words of “Yesseus, Mazareus, Yessedekus.” It is emphasized that “the seed, those who will receive his name upon the water, will fight against the power” (V, 5.83.4-7).

The threefold descent of the redeemer figure, actualized through the “tripartite periodization of history, revelation, or judgment,”⁷⁸ is significantly symbolized in the water baptism, thereby attaining the Pleroma in the ritual. This symbolical attainment of the Pleroma through the baptism with “five seals”⁷⁹ is seen in the *Gospel of Egyptians*:

Then the great Seth was sent by the four lights, by the will of the Autogenes and the whole pleroma, through <the gift> and the good pleasure of the great invisible Spirit, and the *five seals*, and the whole pleroma. He passed through the *three parousias* which I mentioned before: the flood, and the conflagration, and the judgment of the archons and the powers and the authorities, to save her (the race) who went astray, through the reconciliation of the world, and the *baptism* through a Logos-begotten body which the great Seth prepared for himself secretly through the virgin, in order that the saints may be begotten by the holy Spirit, through invisible, secret symbols, through a reconciliation of the world with the world, through the renouncing of the world, and the god of the thirteen aeons, and (through) the convocations of the saints and the ineffable ones, and (through) the incorruptible bosom, and (through) the great light of the Father, who pre-existed with his Providence, and established through her *the holy baptism that surpasses the heaven*, through the incorruptible, Logos-begotten one, even Jesus the living one, even he whom the great Seth has put on. And through him, he nailed the powers of the *thirteen aeons*, and established those who are brought forth and taken away. He armed them with an armor of knowledge of this truth, with an unconquerable power of incorruptibility. (III, 2.62.24-64.9)

⁷⁸ Pheme Perkins, “Apocalypse of Adam: The Genre and Function of A Gnostic Apocalypse,” *CBQ* 39 (1977): 387-89.

⁷⁹ There seems to be five stages of the baptismal rite in this community: invocation, renunciations, five seals in the living water, instructions, and immortalization (66.7-8).

All these Sethian gnostic texts implying water baptism are related with the redemptive descent of the gnostic redeemer (Seth, Sophia, or Christ), which is symbolically ritualized in the initiate's immersion into the water and ascent from it. Furthermore, it always signals the eschatological action of the savior who overcomes the powers of darkness (Chaos, Hades, or Abyss) and the gifts that are given to the gnostic elect.

The traditional material treating the harrowing of Hades seems to be adopted in the Sethian baptismal text, with the explication of its ritual meaning. The earlier Sethian gnosticized text of the *descensus* tradition at the end of the longer version of the *Apocryphon of John* has been expanded and systematized in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (NHC XIII) through the three-revelation schema by associating it with the trimorphic deity⁸⁰ and elaborating it into the first person aretology of Protennoia as Father-Voice, Mother-Speech, and Son-Logos.⁸¹ These accounts clearly refer to the destruction of the underworld as the result of each revelatory descent.⁸²

And I entered into the midst of their prison, which is the prison of the body. And I said, "He who hears, let him get up from the deep sleep." And he wept and shed tears. Bitter tears he wiped from himself and he said, "Who is it that calls my name, and from where has this hope come to me, while I am in the chains of the prison?" And I said, "I am the Pronoia of the pure light; I am the thinking of the virginal Spirit, who raised you up to the honored place. Arise and remember that it is you who hearkened, and follow your root, which is I, the merciful one, and guard yourself against the angels of poverty and the demons of chaos and all those who ensnare you, and beware of the deep sleep and the enclosure of the inside of Hades." And I raised him up, and sealed him in the light of the water with *five seals*, in order that death might not have power over him from this time on. (*Ap. John*, II, 1.30.36-31.25)

And I gave to him from the Water of Life, which strips him of the chaos that is in the uttermost darkness that exists inside the entire abyss, that is, the thought of the

⁸⁰ Perkins, "Apocalypse of Adam," 389.

⁸¹ Turner, "Sethian Gnosticism," 63.

⁸² The following sections belong to the third descent of the redeemer figures (Pronoia, or Protennoia).

corporeal and the psychic. All these I put on. And I stripped him of it, and I put upon him a shining Light, that is, the knowledge of the Thought of the Fatherhood. And I delivered him to those who give robes - Yammon, Elasso, Amenai— and they covered him with a robe from the robes of the Light; and I delivered him to the baptizers, and they baptized him - Micheus, Michar, Mnesinous - and they immersed him in the spring of the Water of Life... And he received the Five seals from the Light of the Mother, Protennoia, and it was granted him to partake of the mystery of knowledge, and he became a Light in Light... And I proclaimed to them the ineffable *Five Seals* in order that I might abide in them and they also might abide in me. (*Trimorphic Protennoia*, XIII, 1.47.7-20, 48.31-35, 50.9-11)

The Five Seals in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* imply both water baptism and celestial baptism, which means the loosening of the bonds of the flesh by which the underworld powers enslave Protennoia's fallen members. This redemptive work to save the souls from the powers of Hades is called "mystery" (41.3, 27; 42.28; 48.33-34). According to Turner, this text had undergone the Christianizing process, when the threefold manifestations of Protennoia as Voice, Speech, and Logos were incorporated into Christian materials.⁸³ In this incorporation, Christ's incarnation is seen as docetic ("the likeness of their shape," 47.16). All of these Sethian baptismal texts show their relation to the *descensus* tradition of the harrowing of Hades.

The *Descensus* Tradition as Petrine

Pauline or Petrine?

1 Peter has been considered as belonging to "the development after Paul," thereby being classified within the sphere of deutero-Paulinism whose phase is "the church on the

⁸³ Turner, "Sethian Gnosticism," 64.

way to becoming an institution.”⁸⁴ On the basis of its similar terminology and theology, 1 Peter has often been characterized as a “variant of Paulinism.”⁸⁵ It is not certain whether the affinity or similarity between 1 Peter and the Pauline corpus is the literary dependency between them⁸⁶ or simply the literary affinity based on the Jesus tradition of the Gospels.⁸⁷ Although the relationship to the Pauline corpus is seen in Romans and Ephesians, none of them is entirely verbatim in such a way as to make necessary the conclusion of literary dependence.⁸⁸ In addition to this literary affinity with the Pauline letters, it is noted that the letters of James and Hebrews have points of contact with 1 Peter. Some common characteristic expressions between 1 Peter on the one hand, and Hebrews⁸⁹ and Romans on the other hand, might make plausible Elliott’s argument that, in spite of the indirect Pauline influence, 1 Peter is more related to the Roman community rather than the Pauline because the letter to Hebrews was sent from the Roman church:

⁸⁴ Hans Conzelmann, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 289-317. See also Norman Perrin, *The New Testament: An Introduction; Proclamation and Parenthesis, Myth and History* (New York: Harcourt-Brace-Jovanovich, 1974), 253-75..

⁸⁵ Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 29, lists such scholars as Knopf, Bultmann, and Lohse who consider its Pauline characteristic in 1 Peter.

⁸⁶ John H. Elliott, “The Rehabilitation of An Exegetical Step-Child: 1 Peter in Recent Research,” *JBL* 95/2 (1976): 246, summarizes Beare’s position of 1 Peter’s literary dependence on the Pauline corpus from his commentary, *First Epistle of Peter*, while he contrasts him with Selwyn’s defense of the Silvanus secretarial theory in which 1 Peter is paralleled with 1-2 Thessalonians.

⁸⁷ For more details, see Elliott, “Rehabilitation,” 247, showing that the articles by J. P. Brown, C. Spicq, R. Gundry, E. Best, and J. Elliott indicate that there are contact points between 1 Peter and the Gospel traditions.

⁸⁸ Goppelt, 28-29

⁸⁹ See such parallels as the alien status of believers (1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11/Heb. 11:13), the blood of sprinkling (1:2/Heb. 12:24), the living word (1:23/Heb. 4:12), the bearing up of sins (2:24/Heb. 10:10), Jesus the Shepherd (2:25; 5:4/Heb. 13:20), Christ’s suffering unto death ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς (3:18/Heb. 9:28), Christ as example (3:22/Heb. 12:17), the inherited blessing (3:9/Heb. 12:17), and bearing the humiliation of Christ (4:14/Heb. 13:13; 11:26).

“Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy send you greetings” (Heb. 13:24). Similar language used in Romans, Hebrews, and *1 Clement*⁹⁰ might indicate that 1 Peter’s terminology and concept are based on the locally conditioned linguistic and conceptual tradition of Rome.

Rather than literary dependence on the Pauline corpus, 1 Peter appears to share a broadly varied liturgical, paraenetic, catechetical tradition of the Roman church with Paulinism. F. L. Cross argues that 1 Peter reflects not only baptismal interest but also a paschal tone, basing his argument on comparing the baptismal rites described in the *Apostolic Traditions* of Hippolytus of Rome.⁹¹ If these Roman baptismal traditions (homily, creeds, or catechism) underlie 1 Peter, the literary design of 1 Peter centers on the baptismal rites that serve to illuminate the whole text of 1 Peter, which originated in the western Roman tradition. If the peculiar Petrine tradition developed in Rome as the interpretation of the Jesus tradition under the indirect influence of Paulinism, it seems to me that some trace of the Petrine tradition might be found in this baptismal tradition.

Compared with the Pastoral Epistles, the circular letters in the book of Revelation, and the letters of Ignatius, which are concerned with the debate with Jews,

⁹⁰ 1 Clem. 59:2/1 Pet. 2:9 –“called us from darkness to light”; *1 Clem.* 49:5/1 Pet. 4:8- “love covers a multitude of sins”; *1 Clem.* 57:1/1 Pet. 5:5- subjecting oneself to the elders; and reference to παροιμία in the address of *1 Clem.*/1 Pet. 1:1.

⁹¹ Frank L. Cross, *1 Peter: A Paschal Liturgy* (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1954). The document of the so-called Apostolic Tradition, which was formerly called “Egyptian Church Order,” has been considered as a work written by Hippolytus in the early third century C.E., originated in Rome, by many scholars. But its single authorship attributed to Hippolytus is rejected by J. Magne, A. Faivre, and M. Metzger. Interestingly, the document apparently circulated more widely in the East than in the West. For more details, see Paul F. Bradshaw et al., *The Apostolic Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 1-14.

Gnosticism, or docetism,⁹² 1 Peter is much more concerned with Christian sufferings under cultural and social pressures.⁹³ Although 1 Peter has a western origin, the first incontestable use of 1 Peter is attested by the eastern fathers in the early second century C.E., as in Polycarp's *Letter to Philippi* from Smyrna⁹⁴ and in the testimony of Papias of Hierapolis.⁹⁵ More interestingly, Marcion of Sinope, who claimed himself as a successor of the Apostle Paul, knew the tradition of the *Descensus Christi* (1 Pet. 3:19). He twisted this church tradition of Christ's preaching to the dead in Hades, which is well attested by the eastern and western church fathers ironically in the first two centuries,⁹⁶ into its opposite and taught that Christ saved all the sinners mentioned in the Old Testament, including Cain and the people of Sodom and Egypt, but not the righteous ones of the Old Testament.⁹⁷ Marcion interpreted 1 Peter 3:19 in his own way,⁹⁸

⁹² While the Paulinist fights against the Marcionite gnostic "contradictions (*ἀντιθέσεις*) of what is false called knowledge" (*γνώσεις*) in 1 Tim. 6:20, Ignatius rejects docetism in his letters, *Trallians* 9-10, *Smyrnaeans* 2-3, and *Magnesians* 9.1-2.

⁹³ It is much argued that the persecution referred to in 1 Peter is the hostility, harassment, and ostracism of a local, social, and unofficial nature rather than an imperial persecution mentioned in the correspondence of the Governor of Bithynia-Pontus, Pliny the Younger with Trajan (98-117 C.E.). Elliott adds that a growing number of scholars reject the Trajan theory for the background of 1 Peter. This indicates that the unofficial nature of persecution points to the earlier dating of 1 Peter between 70 and 90 C.E., following Nero's unofficial persecution.

⁹⁴ For its parallels, see the *Letter to the Philippians*, 1.3, 2.1-2, 5.3, 7.2, 8.1, 10.2. Eusebius attests that Polycarp in his letter to the Philippians "made use of some quotations from the first epistle of Peter" (*HE* 4.14.9).

⁹⁵ Eusebius, *HE* 3.39.17.

⁹⁶ In the first half of the second century, an apocryphal so-called *Jeremiah logion* was quoted by Justin (*Dialogue* 72) and Irenaeus (6 times in *Adversus Haereses*): "the Lord God remembered His dead people of Israel who lay in the graves; and He descended to preach to them His own salvation." Ignatius, Clement, and Origen also witnessed this tradition explicitly, although the Alexandrians first related it to 1 Peter.

⁹⁷ Irenaeus, *AH* 1.27.3; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 1.3.42.4.

⁹⁸ The later Marcionite myth of the *Descensus Christi* is described in an explicitly gnostic way. See George R. S. Mead, *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten: The Gnostics, a Contribution to the Study of the Origins of Christianity* (New Hyde Park, NY: University

rejecting the salvation of the Old Testament saints in Hades who had been faithful to the Demiurge, even though he knew 1 Peter, but rejected it for his canon because he claimed to follow Paul, implicitly, but not Peter.

I would argue that even though the western Peter (a Roman community)⁹⁹ constructed its theology and concepts in accord with Pauline or the baptismal tradition of the Roman church, yet the eastern Peter seemed to have left vestiges of its peculiar Christological formation. Even in the western tradition, the *Descensus Christi* remains firm as a continuing apostolic tradition. The *Shepherd of Hermas* (9.16.5), which had been considered a part of the canon in the Roman church, preserves the tradition of the *Descensus Christi*, while the tradition itself became more elaborated and appropriated in the East (Alexandria, Syria, and Asia Minor).¹⁰⁰ In this regard, 1 Peter 3:18-22 should be interpreted from the perspective of the Pauline tradition of baptismal formula, while the Petrine tradition of the *Descensus Christi* should be traced within it.

Books, 1960), 241-49.

⁹⁹ Such scholars as Lohse, Goppelt, Best, and Elliott argue for a Petrine group in the Roman church behind the composition of 1 Peter, though they have agreed on its pseudepigraphical work after the death of Peter. See John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 270-95; Eduard Lohse, "Parenesis and Kerygma," in *Perspectives on First Peter*, ed. Charles H. Talbert, trans. John Steely (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 53-55; Goppelt, *1 Peter*, 48-53; Ernest Best, *1 Peter* (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1971), 59-65.

¹⁰⁰ Interestingly, among the versions of the so-called *Apostolic Traditions of Hippolytus*, only the eastern versions of Sahidic, Arabic, and Ethiopic have a baptismal confession of Christ's releasing of the souls as the result of his descent before ascension, but not in the Latin version, *Canons of Hippolytus*, and *Testamentum Domini*. See Bradshaw et al., *The Apostolic Traditions*, section on "Concerning the Tradition of Holy Baptism" (21.15), 116. The Alexandrian interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18-22 is certainly supportive of the *Descensus Christi*. The Syriac *Teaching of Addai* and the Syriac *Didascalia*, the writings of Ephraem Syrus and Aphraates, the *Acts of Thomas* show that among Syrian Christians the descent of Christ into Hades must have been a favorite doctrine. See MacCulloch, *Harrowing of Hell*, 67-74.

1 Peter 3:18-22 as a Baptismal Conceptualization: *Paraenesis* for Christian Sufferings

The majority of exegetes today understand the situation of persecution reflected in 1 Peter as one of suspicion, slander and unfriendliness of a pagan society towards Christians, resulting in social alienation and unpopularity.¹⁰¹ In this social situation of early Christianity in a pagan society, the author of 1 Peter provides it as an apologetic or paraenetic letter for the new Christian community which appears as the household of God, a home for the homeless, and thus averts the inherent dangers of disintegration and abandonment of faith resulting from the social and religious tensions.¹⁰² Such dangers of social disintegration and abandonment of faith make the author of 1 Peter interpret Christian sufferings as bearing theological meaning when Christian life begins with baptism. According to D. Hill, if there is a baptismal theme in 1 Peter, it is because baptism is the occasion and sign of voluntary self-commitment to the Christian way and the transition from an old way of life to another that is marked by a new ethic, which will inevitably involve suffering; i.e., by accepting baptism “a person is affirming his willingness to share in the known experience of baptized persons who were commonly, if not constantly, treated with suspicion and hostility.”¹⁰³ Hill’s understanding of a Christian baptism and the linking of suffering and baptism are likely to be an apologetic attempt to provide a new meaning for Christians who go through real physical

¹⁰¹ This position is based on the fact that in the letter there is no hint of the official state persecution as in the time of Domitian (81-96 C.E.) and Trajan (111-112 C.E.), but a hint of some catastrophic event like the destruction of Jerusalem (70 C.E.) or the Neronian persecution (64-68 C.E.) in the reference to “Babylon” (5:13), a symbolic name for Rome.

¹⁰² Elliott, *Home for the Homeless*, 106-50, 200-20.

¹⁰³ David Hill, “On Suffering and Baptism in 1 Peter,” *NovT* 18 (1976): 184-85.

sufferings.¹⁰⁴ Thus the recent study of 1 Peter has come to deal with its paraenetic character.¹⁰⁵

As for Christian baptism, it is different from the Pauline understanding of baptismal union with Christ, which is metaphorical (Rom. 6; Col. 2). Although the baptismal homily or liturgy as a theory of composition for 1 Peter is disputed among scholars, it has been agreed that the baptismal tone or theme runs through the letter: references to “new birth” (1:3, 23; 2:2), “new born infants” (2:2), and “baptism” (3:21). Together with this pervasiveness of the baptismal theme of self-commitment to the Christian way in the letter,¹⁰⁶ the references at some point to actual or potential sufferings on the part of the Christians run through the 1 Peter.

The main paraenetic message of 1 Peter is that suffering under the pressures of society belongs to the very essence of Christian existence.¹⁰⁷ This main message of encouragement and exhortation for the Asian Christians undergoing suffering constitutes

¹⁰⁴ Hill's argument rejects “baptismal homily” (Bornemann, Perdelwitz, Streeter, Beare, Windisch), “baptismal liturgy/ Eucharist” (Preisker, Cross, Leaney), and “pre-baptismal catechism” (Selwyn, Carrington) as a theory of composition for 1 Peter because those theories are misleading in that the chief concern of 1 Peter is with the conduct of Christians undergoing affliction and suffering and because those do not provide a satisfactory means of linking the theme of suffering and that of baptism. For the evaluation and history of compositional theories of 1 Peter, see Jacob Prasad, ch. 2, “the Unity and Literary Genre of 1 Peter,” in *Foundations of the Christian Way of Life According to 1 Peter 1:13-25: An Exegetico-Theological Study* (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2000), 47-74.

¹⁰⁵ See Lauri Thurén, *Argument and Theology in 1 Peter: The Origin of Christian Paraenesis*, JSNT Supplement Series 114 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 14-29, citing Martin Dibelius, “Zur Formgeschichte des Neuen Testaments (ausserhalb der Evangelien),” *Theologische Rundschau* 3 (1931): 207-41, who characterizes 1 Peter as a typical paraenesis.

¹⁰⁶ Selwyn's theory of a unified catechetical structure underlying 1 Peter is based on pre-baptismal teachings of catechumen virtues and social duties for the Christian new life. See his commentary, *First Epistle of St. Peter*, 363-64.

¹⁰⁷ Goppelt, *1 Peter*, 37.

the literary unity of 1 Peter, even though many scholars have argued for the partition-theory (different situations between 2:11-4:11 and 4:12-5:11) and the baptismal, catechetical, or creedal fragments used for the letter.¹⁰⁸ From such a paraenetical purpose, the author uses a special language of “suffering.” (2:19f; 3:14, 17; 4:1, 15, 19; 5:10). The affliction of the Christian community is not characterized by the LXX technical terms, διωγμός and διώκειν, which are used in various places of the New Testament, not even in 3:14, where the “persecuted” is pronounced to be blessed.¹⁰⁹ Rather, only πάσχω (4:15, 19; 5:10) and its cognate (πάθημα -4:13, 5:9) appear in 1 Peter as a general and abstract term for suffering. As Davids notes, this abstract term of πάσχω for suffering appears almost exclusively in intertestamental literature and additions to the Hebrew Bible, while the LXX lacks a single theological term for suffering.¹¹⁰

The significant use of πάσχω and its cognates points to the author’s special theological redefinition of suffering in the letter. It is noted that the theology of suffering is developed as the letter comes to the concluding part which addresses existing hardships from 4:12. This concluding part of the discourse on “suffering” ends with the reference to ἀγαθοποιᾶ (“right behavior,” 4:19), which demonstrates the necessity for “suffering” as a consequence of “right behavior.”¹¹¹ Around the era of the New Testament, the concept of “innocent suffering” had been already developed through the

¹⁰⁸ Goppelt, *1 Peter*, 26-35, has a quite sound evaluation of the form-criticism and the tradition-criticism.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 37.

¹¹⁰ Peter H. Davids, “Excursus: Suffering in 1 Peter and the New Testament” in *The First Epistle of Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 31.

¹¹¹ Goppelt, *1 Peter*, 38.

intertestamental period; the righteous is persecuted by the unrighteous. 1 Peter characterizes suffering as “trials” (1:6), “fiery ordeal” (4:12), or self-discipline (1:13). This idea of innocent suffering is seen in other epistles such as James 1:1-4, 12-15 and Hebrews 12:3-11, even though James will ultimately trace the origin of the test to the Devil. Davids finds these newly developed points of suffering in the events of Jesus who was recognized as the righteous sufferer *par excellence*.¹¹²

Interestingly, the meaning of suffering is conceptualized as “baptism” in the Jesus tradition, and thereby Moule argues that the theme of baptism is closely connected with that of suffering:

Suffering is connected with baptism (through Christ’s baptism which meant the Cross), and baptism is an epitome of the Christian doctrine of suffering. There is no context where Christian thought more naturally takes baptismal shape than the context of persecution.¹¹³

The Jesus tradition demonstrates that Christ’s baptism meant his suffering and the Cross:

But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” They replied, “We are able.” Then Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized.” (Mk 10:38-39)

I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! (Lk 12:50)

The fact that the suffering of Christ is theologically conceptualized as “baptism” in the Jesus tradition appears to have developed a Christian way of thinking that baptism itself necessarily involves suffering (1 Thess. 2:14, 3:2f.; Heb. 10:32f.). Therefore the

¹¹² Davids, *First Epistle of Peter*, 37.

¹¹³ Charles F. D. Moule, “The Nature and Purpose of 1 Peter,” *NTS* 3 (1956-57): 11.

imitation of Christ, especially in suffering, is a prominent theme throughout 1 Peter.¹¹⁴

Following or participating in Christ's suffering is clearly in the contemplation of Christ's suffering:

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example (ὑπογραμμός), so that you should follow in his steps (ἵχνος). "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. (2:21-24)

If the *Imitatio Christi* which is implied above ("an example," "his steps") is emphasized in the baptismal context under the circumstance of the inevitability of unmerited hostility and persecution, this might be addressed to the recently baptized ("new-born infants," 2:2).¹¹⁵ The term ἀναγεννάω (1:3, 23) and the repeated emphasis on νῦν (1:12; 2:10, 25; 3:21) indicate the new situation that "obtains when Gentiles, with Jews, are being together formed into Israel and the tide of the universal Gospel is felt to be in full

¹¹⁴ Robert H. Gundry, "*Verba Christi* in 1 Peter: Their Implications Concerning the Authorship of 1 Peter and the Authenticity of the Gospel Tradition," *NTS* 13 (1966-67): 343, argues that 1 Peter 4:19 and the last word of Jesus from the Cross have remarkable similarity because the letter encourages the readers to endure sufferings according to God's will, entrusting themselves to a faithful Creator.

¹¹⁵ John H. Elliott, "Ministry and Church Order in the NT: A Traditio-Historical Analysis (1 Pet. 5:1-5 & plls.)," *CBQ* 32 (1970): 367-91, maintains that the implication of νεώτερος in 5:5 is a recent convert to the faith ("neophyte in the faith") in the larger ministerial and church order tradition, and its term and πρεσβύτερος in 5:1, 5 set up the *Sitz im Leben* of the baptismal catechesis of the early church.

flood.”¹¹⁶ The only explicit reference to the word, βάπτισμα in 3:21 considers 3:18-22 as a baptismal hymn for the following analysis.¹¹⁷

Some scholars tried to reconstruct a baptismal credo (*Bekenntnis*) behind the passage of 3:18-22 to discover the fragment of a primitive Christological hymn or creed. Bultmann, Boismard, and Wengst attempted to reconstruct the original fragment as follows:

(πιστεύω τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν),	
τὸν τροεγνωσμένον μὲν πρὸ Καταβολῆς κόσμου	- 1:20
φανερωθέντα δὲ ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τῶν χρόνων·	
ὃς ἔπαθεν ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν,	- 3:18 without δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων
ἵνα ἡμᾶς προσαγάγῃ τῷ θεῷ,	
θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκί,	
ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι,	
ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν ἐκήρυξε,	- 3:19
πορευθεὶς (δὲ) εἰς οὐρανὸν ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ θεοῦ,	- 3:22
ὑποταγέντων αὐτῷ ἀγγέλων καὶ ἐξουσιῶν καὶ δυνάμεων.	(Bultmann) ¹¹⁸

(Le Christ)	
pré-connu avant la création du monde,	- 1:20
manifesté à la fin des temps,	
mis à mort par la chair,	
vivifié par l’esprit	
évangélisé aux morts	(replaced with 4:6)
parti au ciel	
lui étant soumis : Anges et Dominations et Puissances.	(Boismard) ¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Edward G. Selwyn, “Eschatology in 1 Peter,” in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology*, ed. William D. Davies and David Daube (Cambridge: University Press, 1956), 394.

¹¹⁷ Marie-Emilie Boismard, *Quatre Hymnes Baptismales dans la Première Épître de Pierre* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1961), sees 1 Pet. 1:3-5, 2:22-25, 3:18-22, and 5:5-9 as four baptismal hymnes. But Davids, *First Epistle of Peter*, 12, argues that a balanced structure of 3:18-22 is mostly likely to be hymnic.

¹¹⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, “Bekenntnis- und Liedfragmente im ersten Petrusbrief,” *Coniectanea Neotestamentica* 11 (1947): 1-14; Reprint in *Exegetica*, ausgewählt, eingeleitet und herausgegeben von E. Dinkler (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1967), 297.

¹¹⁹ Boismard, 62, reconstructs the form in seven lines beginning in Greek with an

ὁ προεγνωσμένος μὲν πρὸ Καταβολῆς κόσμου, - 1:20
 φανερωθεὶς δὲ ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν χρόνων,
 θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκί, - 3:18
 ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι,
 πορευθεὶς εἰς οὐρανόν, - (only 3 :22a and c)
 ὑποταγέντων αὐτῷ ἀγγέλων καὶ ἐξουσιῶν καὶ δυνάμεων. (Wengst)¹²⁰

These reconstructions of three scholars share some common elements in the contents. 1 Peter 1:20, which proclaims that Christ is predestined before the time and now revealed in the final time, is demonstrated as an introductory kerygma of the church in the Christological event. Another common theme is that “Christ died in the flesh and lived in the spirit,” whose kerygmatic expression is also found in Rom. 1:3f and 1 Tim. 3:16.¹²¹ While both Bultmann and Boismard include Christ’s preaching to the spirits in prison (or to the dead) in its baptismal confession, Wengst omitted it from the formula.¹²² Most of all, all three scholars omit a prosaic and catechetical passage of 3:20-21 because of the author’s apparent use of the flood-story in relation to baptism, which might contain the preexisting material that is seen in the apocalypticism of *I Enoch*.¹²³

Apart from the primitive Christological statement (primitive kerygma), what appears to be an interpretive key to understanding the passage of 3:18-22 is the author’s paraenetical commentary on the nature (v. 18b) and effect (v. 18c) of Christ’s suffering

orist passive participle. The subject is Christ.

¹²⁰ Klaus Wengst, *Christologische Formeln und Lieder des Urchristentums* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1972), 163.

¹²¹ David Hill, “To Offer Spiritual Sacrifices... (1 Peter 2:5): Liturgical Formulations and Christian Paraenesis in 1 Peter,” *JSNT* 16 (1982): 58.

¹²² Oscar Cullmann includes “descended to the spirits in prison” in the creedal elements from the passage, in his book, *The Earliest Christian Confession*, trans. John K. S. Reid (London: Lutterworth, 1949), 20.

¹²³ Goppelt, *1 Peter*, 250.

and the baptismal definition (v. 21). The phrase, δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων (v. 18b), following Χριστὸς ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἔπαθεν (v. 18a), appears to have originated from the Greek idea of the heroic death for many, while Jesus' death as vicarious atonement (death/sacrifice περὶ/ὑπὲρ ἁμαρτίας) is considered to be analogous to the sin offerings.¹²⁴ The righteous for the unrighteous, as Goppelt notes, follows Greek linguistic sensibilities rather than the Hebrew Bible distinction between “righteous ones” and “sinners” or “godless ones.”¹²⁵ The paraenetical comment of v. 18c to explain the effect of Christ's vicarious atonement is seen in the ἵνα clause, “so that he [Christ] might lead you to God.”¹²⁶ The Greek linguistic distinction between “the righteous” and “the unrighteous” is followed by the unusual expression of Christ's role as one who leads (προσάγω) to God.¹²⁷

Even though Selwyn, Goppelt, and Davids see this clause in terms of the concepts of discipleship (2:21; 4:13—following his steps/sharing Christ's sufferings), or

¹²⁴ The expression of Christ's death as ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν is also Pauline (Rom. 6:10, 8:3; 1 Cor. 15:3; Gal. 1:4; 1 Thess. 5:10) and found more explicitly in Heb. 5:3, 10:6, 8, 18, 26. For the formula of the sin offerings, see Lev. 5:7, 6:23, Ps. 39:7, Isa. 53:5, 10, and Ezek. 43:21-25. There is no difference between περὶ and ὑπὲρ (Gal. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:3; Heb. 5:1, 10:12) because they are used interchangeably.

¹²⁵ Goppelt, *1 Peter*, 251, argues that this distinction was familiar in Greek from the earliest times, e. g. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 4.4.13: ὁ μὲν ἄρα νόμιμος δίκαιός ἐστιν, ὁ δὲ ἄδικος.

¹²⁶ The effect or motive of Christ's suffering/death is continuously introduced with the ἵνα clauses: ἵνα ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ἀπογενόμενοι τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ ζήσωμεν, οὗ τῳ μῶλωπι ἰάθητε (2:24); ἵνα κριθῶσι μὲν κατὰ ἀνθρώπους σαρκὶ ζῶσι δὲ κατὰ θεὸν πνεύματι (4:6).

¹²⁷ Davids recognizes that this expression is not found in other NT writings as Christ's role, even though similar OT expressions in the LXX are found as in leading animals to God for sacrifice (Exod. 29:4; Lev. 1:2, and passim), or bringing a person to God for ordination to some office (Exod. 29:4; Lev. 8:14; Num. 8:9), and similar NT phrases like “access to God” (Rom. 5:1, προσαγωγή) or “approach” (προσέρχομαι) in Hebrews (4:16; 10:19-22, 25; 12:22) are found. See his commentary, *First Epistle of Peter*, 136; cf. Goppelt, *1 Peter*, 21 n, 252.

a new application of the *Imitatio Christi*,¹²⁸ Perdelwitz considers this concept of προσάγειν as related with the technical term for the Greek mystery religion.¹²⁹ He suggests that the phrase in v. 18c, ἵνα ὑμᾶς προσαγάγῃ τῷ θεῷ demonstrates that the author is thinking of Christ as similar to the μυσταγωγός or ὁδηγὸς τῆς ψυχῆς of the mysteries. When Perdelwitz traces some allusions to the mystery religions such as the cults of Isis, Mithras, and Attis, his argument is rejected by Selwyn who argues that the whole climate of 1 Peter is decidedly Jewish.¹³⁰

I think that Perdelwitz's long-rejected argument on the mystery religions as well as other scholarly claim for the only Jewish origin in 1 Peter should be corrected, in that if the baptismal context underlies 3:18-22, its allusion to the *Descensus ad Inferos* cannot be adduced only from Jewish or primitive Christian thought and practice.¹³¹ Rather, in a broader context of Jewish apocalypticism and mysticism as well as Sethian gnostic baptism, all of which appear to be Jewish, baptism itself means a new way of mythical configuration of what Christ's suffering/death means for Christian neophytes. Moreover, it is certain that the author of 1 Peter looks to the Greek concept of the soul's

¹²⁸ Even though Selwyn argues for this in the theological point, Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 245, rejects this because Christ's ἀπαξ suffering is unique in 3:18-22, compared with a call to an *imitatio Christi* in 2:21-25.

¹²⁹ Emil R. Perdelwitz, *Die Mysterienreligion und das Problem des I. Petrusbriefes: Ein literarischer und religionsgeschichtlicher Versuch* (Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1911).

¹³⁰ See Selwyn's critical argument against Perdelwitz's position on 1 Peter's dependence of the mystery religions, in his commentary, *First Epistle of St. Peter*, 305-11.

¹³¹ Selwyn accepts the exception of the concept of the *Descensus*, even though all the other main ideas and phrases adduced have affinities in Jewish or Christian thought. Such commentators as Grudem, Dalton, and Achtemeier reject interpreting 3:19 as an allusion to the *Descensus Christi ad Inferos*.

paideia and immortality in his theological thrust.¹³² In this regard, the mythological configuration of Christ's descent, symbolized in baptism, including something Jewish as well as Greek, is directed toward achieving the "salvation of souls" (1:9).

The author of 1 Peter gives his own definition of Christian baptism to the audience in 3:21, which might offer another hermeneutic key for the interpretation of 3:18-22:

And baptism, which this prefigured (ἀντίτυπος), now saves you—not as a removal (ἀπόθεσις) of dirt from the body, but as an appeal (ἐπερώτημα) to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

While the grammar of v. 21 is difficult, it is certain that baptism is considered as an active, energetic matter, which is conceptualized as an act or experience of salvation.¹³³ The word ἐπερώτημα is *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament and is placed in apposition with the word βάπτισμα. This controversial term signifies and emphasizes the certainty of the salvation which is argued for with the *exemplum* of Noah, in that "water" (water baptism and the Flood) makes a division between the believers and non-believers, i.e, salvation and judgment, just as in the days of Noah.¹³⁴ The author deliberately chooses this word, by demonstrating that baptism means "a declaration of an appropriate awareness

¹³² The author of 1 Peter confirms that the outcome of faith is the salvation of the soul (ψυχή, 1:9). His exhortation of the *paideia* of the soul in this world to the audience is made against the desires (ἐπιθυμία) of the flesh (σαρκικός, 2:11). These ideas are obviously Platonic. The Greek doctrine of the soul is fully described in Plato's idea on the *paideia* of the soul (*Apology* 30a-b; *Phaedo* 107c), based on the threefold partitioning (λογιστικόν, θυμοειδής, επιθυμητικόν) of the soul (*Republic* 4.436a; *Timaeus* 69d-70a, 70d-e), and in his doctrine of the soul's immortality (*Phaedrus* 245c-46a), based on the Orphic-Pythagorean idea of the divine soul.

¹³³ Oscar S. Brooks, "1 Peter 3:21—The Clue to the Literary Structure of the Epistle," *NovT* 16 (1974): 291.

¹³⁴ Thurén, *Argument and Theology in 1 Peter*, 163-64.

toward God.” According to Reike, the word ἐπερώτημα involves such meanings as “question,” “declaration,” or “agreement,”¹³⁵ while Greeven considers it as “prayer” in terms of an oracular question addressed to God (with the phrase, εἰς θεόν).¹³⁶

Rejecting the common interpretation of συνείδησις as “conscience,” Brooks especially takes notice of its etymological meaning, “knowledge shared with another” or “co-knowledge,” which might convey an idea that one is consciously aware of a situation, circumstance, attitude or factor important to his or her being.¹³⁷ If this understanding of the author’s definition of baptism underlies the paraenetical comment at the point of baptismal confession, baptism itself presupposes an open declaration or agreement to follow Jesus’ steps or example and to accept the consequence of becoming a Christian, while one is very much aware of Christian situations under social pressures.

The Petrine Tradition of the *Descensus Christi*

In the history of the interpretation of the passage 3:19-20, the early popular interpretation was that the passage was a reference to Christ’s preaching to human beings in the underworld during the *triduum mortis*, while some argued

¹³⁵ Reicke, *Disobedient Spirit*, 182-86. He argues that this word involves a professional term for the making of a contract between a questioning party (the church) and the answering party (the candidate for baptism), requiring a positive moral undertaking, and denies any implication of “prayer” in the text.

¹³⁶ Heinrich Greeven, “ἐπερώτημα” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 688-89.

¹³⁷ Brooks, 293.

that the subject of the preaching was Enoch.¹³⁸ A second line of interpretation takes the passage as a reference to Christ's preaching to the fallen angels alluded to in Gen. 6, *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees* and other Jewish writings.¹³⁹ Both of these views reflect diverse opinions as to the content of the message (salvation or condemnation) according to the different receivers (the righteous, the sinners, or the fallen angels).¹⁴⁰ The important commonality is that the preaching by Christ took place in Hades during the time between his death and resurrection.

A third major line of interpretation is that Christ does his preaching of victory over evil powers after his resurrection, which view is not only partly based on understanding ζωοποιέω in 3:18 as demanding bodily resurrection, but also on a linkage of πορεύομαι used in vv. 19 and 22.¹⁴¹ In more recent years this line of interpretation has become increasingly popular.¹⁴² But I would prefer

¹³⁸ For the lists of scholars, see John S. Feinberg, "1 Peter 3:18-20, Ancient Mythology, and the Intermediate State," *WTS* 48 (1986): 303-36.

¹³⁹ Selwyn, *First Epistle of St. Peter*, 316, lists scholars who hold this view, which has no direct connection between the ἐκήρυξεν of 3:19 and εὐηγγελίθη of 4:6. Selwyn, Reicke, and Dalton consider the disobedient spirits as fallen angels.

¹⁴⁰ Alois Grillmeier, "Der Gottessohn im Totenreich: Soteriologische und christologische Motivierung der Descensuslehre in der älteren christlichen Überlieferung," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 71 (1949): 4-5, divides the complexity of the *descensus* tradition into three soteriological themes or aspects of Christ's activity in the underworld: 1) Christ's preaching to the dead (the preaching theme, *Predigtmotiv*); 2) Christ's administration of baptism in the underworld (the baptism theme, *Taufmotiv*); 3) Christ's subjugation of hell and the liberation of the just (the battle theme, *Kampfmotiv*). Further, Urban Holzmeister, *Commentarius in Epistulas SS. Petri et Iudae apostolorum* (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1937), 307, conveniently, categorizes the preaching theme into three aspects: 1) preaching for conversion, 2) preaching as announcement of liberation, and 3) preaching as a condemnatory judgment.

¹⁴¹ Dalton holds this view, based on Karl Gschwind, *Die Niederfahrt Christi in die Unterwelt: Ein Beitrag zur Exegese des Neuen Testamentes und zur Geschichte des Taufsymbols* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1911). He sees Christ's proclamation as the occasion of the ascension. See his article, "Interpretation and Tradition: An Example from 1 Peter," *Gregorianum* 49/1 (1968): 19.

¹⁴² It appears that more conservative circle of scholars such as Dalton, Grudem,

the line of interpretation in which 3:19 implies the *descensus ad inferos* in the mythological configuration of Christ's death in the baptismal rite.

As many commentators notice, some parallel development is seen around the word πορευθεῖς in vv. 19 and 22:

He was put to death in the flesh, made alive in the spirit (v. 18d);

In which he went (πορευθεῖς) and preached to the spirits in prison... baptism which now saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (vv. 19-21).

He went (πορευθεῖς) into heaven, and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities and powers subject to him (v. 22).

Dalton argues that this parallel proves that the "going" of 3:19 refers to the same event as the "going" of 3:22 and therefore 3:19 must deal with the ascension of Christ. In contrast to Dalton's argument, Selwyn demonstrates that the parallel should be seen as the balance between the *Descensus* and the *Ascensus* which is strongly brought out by Pauline thoughts:¹⁴³

But the righteousness based on faith says, Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down) or "Who will *descend into the abyss*?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). (Rom. 10:6-7)

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:9-11)

As with Paul who recognizes the tradition of Christ's *descensus ad inferos* and thereby conceptualizes it in terms of Christ's cosmic lordship, though he has a reservation of its

Feinberg, Kelly, and Achtemeier reject the idea of the *Descensus Christi* because the New Testament has no specific and explicit reference to Christ's ministry in Hades for the dead or angels.

¹⁴³ Selwyn, *First Epistle of St. Peter*, 318-23.

articulation because of his geocentric cosmology (no subterranean Hades for him), it is probable that the author of 1 Peter implies Christ's cosmic journey like Enoch, in using the term πορευθεῖς, even though he did not use the word καταβαίνω in its place, as Paul did. As a very close parallel hymn to 3:18-22, 1 Timothy 3:16 is mostly suggested:

Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated (δικαίω) in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory.

J. T. Sanders sees "seen by angels" as a reference to the submission of the angels to the redeemer and thus argues that the parallel between "vindicated in spirit" in 1 Timothy 3:16 and "preached to the spirits" in 1 Peter 3:19 supposes that the spirits in prison are "angels" and imply the sphere of the spirits.¹⁴⁴ If this parallel is valid because the creedal formula of the early church has some commonality, the concept of Christ's vindication or setting souls free in the sphere of the spirits might be implied in 1 Peter 3:19. In this regard, "things into which angels long to look" (1:12) has the same connotation, referring to God's vindication of the spiritual world through the cosmic recognition of Christ's appearance. Related with this cosmic recognition of salvation in the spiritual realm, Christ's appearance at the third heaven where Paradise and Hades are located, the author or editor of 2 *Enoch* sees Christ's ("the last one") arriving there as an event that redeems Adam and the ancestors from Hades:

And I [Enoch] ascended to the east, into the paradise of Edem, where rest is prepared for the righteous. And it is open as far as the 3rd heaven; but it is closed off from this world. And the guards are appointed at the very gates to the east of the sun, angels of flame, singing victory songs, never silent, rejoicing at the arrival of the righteous. When the last one arrives, he will bring out Adam, together with the ancestors; and he will bring them in there,

¹⁴⁴ Jack T. Sanders, *The New Testament Christological Hymns: Their Historical Religious Background* (Cambridge: University Press, 1971), 94-95.

so that they may be filled with joy. (2 *Enoch* 42:3-5J)¹⁴⁵

This author explicitly states that the Messianic figure of “the last one” will redeem Adam and the ancestors of Israel from the imprisonment of Hades.

In the end of the baptismal hymn (1 Pet. 3:22), the author emphasizes the subjugation (ὑποταγέντων) of the angelic evil powers (angels, authorities, and powers) in the heavens,¹⁴⁶ which might indicate that the disobedient (ἁπειθήσασιν) spirits in 3:20 came to be finally subjugated. It is the reason why the author of 1 Peter boldly declares, “baptism saves you.” Like the Sethian Gnostics, for the Petrine community, baptism functions as the “seal” of God that is marked by Christ’s descent.¹⁴⁷ Baptism concerns a

¹⁴⁵ This longer recension of 2 *Enoch*, which is an old Slavonic apocalypse, is considered as written or edited by a Christian scribe around the late first century C.E., though no extant manuscript is older than the 14th century. The new geocentric cosmology influenced this literature in that Enoch was seen as ascending through the seven heavens. Francis I. Andersen, section on “2 (Slavonic Apocalypse) Enoch” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:91-100, argues that this literature belongs to the early Jewish community in character at the turn of the era, while Andre Vaillant maintains that 2 *Enoch* is a later Christian version of Jewish Enoch (1 *Enoch*), in his book, *Le Livre des secrets d'Hénoch: Texte slave et traduction française* (Paris: Institut d'études Slaves, 1952), viii-xiii; R. H. Charles, *The Book of Secrets of Enoch*, trans. William R. Morfill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), xxv, claims that its portions with a Hebrew background are at the latest pre-Christian.

¹⁴⁶ See 1 Cor. 15:24; Rom. 8:38-39; Eph. 1:21. Paul has the same cosmology in which the angelic astral powers (στοιχεῖα, Gal. 4:3, 9) are located in the seven heavens as gatekeepers who control the human fates and oversee the ascending souls. This cosmology is related with the gnostic idea that the elemental astral forces are all under the control of the hostile deity Demiurge and evil spirits, and thereby the world is a prison. Paul calls this hostile deity “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4). For the angelic gatekeepers in the descent of the Lord through the seven heavens, see the *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* 10:17-31, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:173-74.

¹⁴⁷ In the *Shepherd of Hermas* (8.6.3; 9.16.3-7; 17.3), baptism is also seen as a “seal” (σφραγίς). This terminology for baptism was widely used in early Christian literature (2 *Clem.* 7.6, 8.6; *Act. Phil.* 134; *Mar. Matt.* 8, 27; *Act. Thom.* 49, 121, 131-32, 152; *Act. Paul Thec.* 25). The sealing act in Christian mystery initiation, however, also can refer to “chrism” (oil anointing), demonstrated in *Act. Thom.* 26, and implicitly in *Gos. Phil.* 67.5, 74.12.

new moral and spiritual life over which sin is no longer to dominate. For this concern, the author emphasizes “the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

The author’s mythological configuration of Christ’s journey to the underworld to overcome the evil spiritual powers is appropriately conceptualized in the rite of baptism. Christ’s journey is not simply considered as a heroic or divine journey to the netherworld, as in the diverse traditions of the *descensus*. But rather Christ’s self-manifestation in the spiritual world is described by the word ἐκήρυξεν. It seems that the author intentionally here chooses this word rather than ἐναγγελίζω (1:12, 25; 4:6; 4:17). Differentiated from “preaching” (ἐναγγελίζω) to the dead (4:6), the author aims to conceptualize the *descensus* tradition as a Christological baptismal confession. Although the majority of uses of κηρύσσω in the New Testament is used in the context of the proclamation of the gospel, in a more general sense, the word can be neutral and merely mean “proclaim.”¹⁴⁸ Thus the term used here indicates Christ’s divine manifestation to “judge the evil spirits”¹⁴⁹ rather than “preaching the gospel to save some imprisoned evil spirits.” This line of interpretation is based on the Jewish myth of the Watchers in which the sinning of the angels before the Noachic Flood resulted in their imprisonment, and the persistence of evil after it until the end of time is attributed to the “demons” who originated from the spirits of the disembodied giants.¹⁵⁰ It is obvious that this old Jewish myth of rebellious

¹⁴⁸ See Goppelt, *1 Peter*, 257; Davids, 39 n, 141; Selwyn, *First Epistle of St. Peter*, 326.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Paul admonishes the Corinthian congregation that they will “judge angels” in the end of time (1 Cor. 6:3).

¹⁵⁰ See Gen. 6:1-5, *1 Enoch* 6.1-7, 7.2-6, and 15.9-12. According to *Jubilees* 10.9, the chief of the evil spirits, Mastema, makes a plea that he and a tenth part of his evil spirits should remain without imprisonment to execute his evil power on earth, which is approved by God, when God commands the angels to carry out the imprisonment of evil spirits, in answer to Noah’s prayer (10.5). See Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, 160-91.

angels about the origin and continuity of evil stands behind 3:19-20. This makes it possible to understand the text as implying the harrowing of Hades.

It is argued that the idea of the *descensus ad inferos* is merged with Jesus' descending into the Jordan for his baptism.¹⁵¹ This perspective comes out of the view that the depths of the waters are the abode of demonic forces like "the abyss." The Jewish literature with Christian interpolations such as the *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* and the *Testament of Asher* refers to Christ's coming to Hades to destroy "the gods of death"¹⁵² or "the dragon's head."¹⁵³ Christ's manifestation in Hades as fearsome is manifested in the *Odes of Solomon* as well as in the *Gospel of Nichodemus/Acts of Pilate*. The Odes sing of the fear that the inhabitants of the deep had for Jesus' baptism (*Ode* 22, 24). At least five Odes mention *Sheol* (17, 22, 24, 39, 42). It is certain that the baptism of Jesus is signified as a terrifying event of overwhelming the depths of Sheol and the resultant expansion of the way of salvation:

Sheol saw me and was shattered, and Death ejected me and many with me. I have been vinegar and bitterness to it, and I went down with it as far as its depth. Then the feet and the head it released, because it was not able to endure my face. And I made a congregation of the living among his dead. (42.11-14)

¹⁵¹ Kilian McDonnell, "The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan and the Descent into Hell," *Worship* 69/2 (1995): 103. See Olivier Rousseau, "La descente aux enfers, fondement sotériologique du baptême chrétien," *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 40 (1951-52): 283-97; Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 225-27.

¹⁵² Without specific reference to baptism, *Asc. Isaiah* 10.7-16 says that Jesus is sent to Sheol through the seven heavens to destroy this power of death. See *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:173.

¹⁵³ *Test. Asher* 7.3. The mythical powers of the waters are judged to be worthless through Christ's crushing the dragon's head in the water. See *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:818.

If the *Odes of Solomon* is a product of the Jewish-Christian Gnostics in the late first or the early second century C.E.,¹⁵⁴ it can be said that its gnostic redeemer myth with the *descensus* into Sheol is fully embedded in the baptismal context.

The pre-Christian Hellenistic Judaism or Gnosticism developed the cosmic aspect of redemption by the savior figure (Word-Wisdom-Son-Angel-Spirit) as a cluster for early Christian redeemer mythology, portrayed in the *Odes of Solomon*, the *Wisdom of Solomon*, and the Sethian gnostic texts.¹⁵⁵ This cosmic aspect of the savior's descent has been embedded in the baptismal rite that symbolizes the harrowing of Hades (defeating the power of death and the deities of the underworld). When the author of 1 Peter uses this motif of the descent, he draws on the old Jewish myth of the Watchers that is a foundation story for his understanding of the consistent evil of the Gentile world. Boldly enough, he configures Christ's death as the savior's descent to Hades to proclaim a "certain message" to the imprisoned sinners. Whether the author has in mind the fallen angels in the old Jewish myth or the famous Greek Titanic gods imprisoned in *Tartarus* such as Tityos, Tantalus, and Sisyphus,¹⁵⁶ Christ became the first and only one

¹⁵⁴ Kurt Rudolf and Jean Daniélou consider this text as belonging to a Jewish Christian Gnosticism, while James H. Charlesworth rejects its gnostic character but thinks that it is a Jewish Christian hymn book of the first century C.E. in his section on the *Odes of Solomon* in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:725-71, and his article, "The Odes of Solomon- Not Gnostic," *CBQ* 31 (1969): 357-69. For scholarly discussions on the *Odes of Solomon*, see Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 91-94.

¹⁵⁵ Talbert, "Myth of A Descending-Ascending Redeemer, 418-40, argues that such a cluster existed from pre-Christian times in certain circles of Hellenistic Judaism. See also Sanders, *New Testament Christological Hymns*, 120; he argues that the developing myth of the personified Wisdom in the *Odes of Solomon* already involves "reunification of the disparate elements and cosmic reconciliation."

¹⁵⁶ See Homer, *Od.* 11.571-600; Hesiod provides another list of criminal demi-gods in *Tartarus* such as Titans, Atlas, Menoetius, Epimetheus, Prometheus, and Typhoeus, in his *Theogony*; see also Vergil's *Aeneid* 6.577-604.

who “proclaimed” to the famous superhuman rebels in Hades. This mythological configuration of Christ’s descent into Hades, that is, the “proclamation to the superhuman rebels,” is the unique idea claimed by the Christina author of 1 Peter in the history of religions and ideas.

It has been noted that the earlier Sethian gnostic texts related with water baptism (*Apocalypson of John, On the Origin of the World, Apocalypse of Adam, Gospel of the Egyptians, Trimorphic Protennoia*) deal with the myth of the redeemer’s descent, adopting the traditional materials of the *descensus* tradition, in the context of water baptism, whether those are pre-Christian or not. Within the intra-struggle between the gnostic and the orthodox Christians, it is interesting to see that the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* (NHC VII, 2), a late second century text under the influence of Sethian and Valentinian gnosis, shows the same conceptualization of the myth in their baptism, when they emphasize unity with one another and spiritual union as making them a heavenly race, under the persecution of the minority “orthodox” church. As a Christian gnostic homily, the author of the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* appears to emphasize the importance of baptism for their existence of the ἐκκλησία through “ineffable water” (49.30) and for union with the Father through “living water” (62.1), while describing Christ’s subjugation of the powers of all archons on his *descensus* into history (51.20-52.10; 54.23-55.8).¹⁵⁷

1 Peter recognizes a myth of the redeemer’s descent and the harrowing of Hades. Just as the early Sethian Gnostics and some Hellenistic Jewish circles gnosticize and ritualize the *descensus* tradition in their baptismal rite, so does the Petrine community

¹⁵⁷ Gregory J. Riley, “Second Treatise of the Great Seth,” in *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, ed. Birger A. Pearson (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 129-200.

contextualize christologically the *descensus* tradition in a Christian baptism. That is, the descent (immersion) into the water means a “seal” which signifies the redeemer’s redemptive work to have overcome the evil powers who were imprisoned in the mythical past. It is likely that what is Christianized from the myth is that 1 Peter uses the term “proclaim” (κηρύσσω) instead of a certain ritual “seal” (σφραγίς)¹⁵⁸ which is usually used in the Sethian texts to refer to sealing up the power of evil, because, for the author of 1 Peter, the word of the Lord has an essential and lasting power (1:25). The sealing work of “proclamation” in the baptismal context, interestingly, is seen in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, a late first-century apocryphon of the early church, which relates the “seal of preaching” with the baptismal occasion, by conceptualizing the baptismal rite for the dead as the apostles’ descending to Hades.¹⁵⁹

Following the first century of the church’s kerygmatic proclamation of Christ, the second century seems to have gone through a more conceptualized doctrine of the harrowing of hell. That is, during the *triduum mortis*, Christ entered Hades, preached to the dead, vanquished death, and released imprisoned souls. The Nag Hammadi text, the *Teachings of Silvanus* (NHC VII, 4, 103.28-104.14 and 110.18-34) developed the

¹⁵⁸ Irenaeus, *Epideixis* (the *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*), ch. 3, manifests that “this baptism is the seal (σφραγίς) of eternal life and is rebirth unto God,” citing *St. Irenaeus: Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. Joseph P. Smith (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1952), 49. See also Clement of Rome, *Epistola* 2, 7.6, and 8.6. In the *Odes of Solomon* 23.5-9, Christ’s descent from on high is the “seal” which the archons cannot loosen.

¹⁵⁹ In the *Shepherd of Hermas* 9.16, the Shepherd sees in his vision “those who heard the good news and received the *seal* are represented by stones taken out of the water to build the tower.” Clement of Alexandria recognizes the baptismal context of the *descensus* myth, quoting the *Shepherd of Hermas*: “and they (apostles) gave them (those who had previously fallen asleep) the *seal of the proclamation*. They descended, therefore, with them into the water, and again ascended alive. But these descended alive, and again ascended alive” (*Stromateis* 2.9).

doctrine of the *Descensus Christi* more than other second-century documents. It is interesting that such a doctrinal elaboration of the myth has been preserved and developed in the pseudonym of Silvanus, who served as Peter's messenger in 1 Peter 5:12. Another interesting point is that even though the Petrine corpus has not proved to have any theological and linguistic connection between them, the author of the *Gospel of Peter* knew the *descensus* motif:

And they heard a voice out of the heavens crying, "Hast thou preached to them that sleep?" And from the Cross there was heard the answer, "yes!" (41-42)

It is possible that the *Descensus Christi* was particularly linked with Peter in the minds of pseudo-Petrine writers.¹⁶⁰ It might be said that the *Descensus Christi* in 1 Peter 3:18-22 is one of the Petrine traditions that can be traced from the early church and probably might be a link with the Petrine corpus.

When social pressures or persecutions are inflicted on the faith community, their baptism gives them a new identity to start a new spiritual life. If Christ's suffering is seen as divine vindication (subjugation of all evil powers), the suffering Christians can be exhorted and encouraged to follow the *Imitatio Christi* when they participate in suffering to death. Both 1 Peter and the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* as a Christian homily might appeal to their heavenly origin through water baptism, which leads to the παιδεία of their souls, while they consider themselves as "strangers"¹⁶¹ in this world (the exiles/aliens, 1 Pet. 1:1, 2:11; *Treat. Seth* 52.9). The faith community regenerated from the baptism call themselves "a chosen race" (2:9) and are encouraged to love another:

¹⁶⁰ Terence V. Smith, *Petrine Controversies in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1985), 43.

¹⁶¹ This designation refers to the Redeemer Seth or the Sethians (*Apoc. Adams* 74.21-23).

Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. (1 Pet. 1:22-23)

[after the baptism of the living water], the perfect are worthy to be established in this way... But the one who lives in agreement and friendship of brotherly love by nature and not by decree, wholly and not in part, this is truly the will of the Father. (*Treat. Seth* 62.1-24)

When Christ's suffering on the Cross is mythically configured as the descent into Hades and announced as the divine victory over the spiritual spheres ("made alive in spirit in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison") at the baptismal rite, Christ's descent into Hades is confessed as a living hope for the suffering Christians.

Summary

Even though there is no evidence of any historical relationship between the Petrine tradition and the Sethian Gnostics, both groups preserve the important theological thrust in the baptismal context. This ritual and liturgical concern is seen in Merkavah mysticism in which "Yordei Merkavah" function as the intermediaries for the mystic group. The idea of the descent comes to liturgical contextualization in the Jewish and Christian group around the end of the first century C.E. This liturgical concern might come from the religious milieu of the Hellenistic age in which the goal of the Greek immortality has been symbolized in diverse ways according to different religions.

The “salvation of souls” (1:9) starts with baptism which makes Christians born anew (ἀναγεννάω) of “immortal seed” (1:23). This would be the language of the Greek immortality, which is used for the Sethian Gnostics, Hellenistic Jewish circle,¹⁶² and Petrine Christians who entrust their souls to Christ, the “shepherd and guardian of souls” (2:25). It appears that the theology of martyrdom and election under persecution comes to emphasize the “immortality” as the destination of their souls and at the same time the “apocalyptic cosmology” as the context of their life situation, prefigured in the old Jewish myth of the Watchers. The Petrine self-designation of “strangers and exiles” implies their journey of the soul in this world. This journey is marked and sealed by Christ’s descent into Hades. Yet they are still supposed to “grow into salvation” (2:2) until the salvation of souls.

The use of the *descensus* tradition by 1 Peter follows a considerably more advanced stage of the trajectory, in that its pattern is similar to the Sethian gnostic baptism as well as some Hellenistic Jewish circles. When it is Christianized and ritualized in the baptismal rite, the metaphor of the water would mean the forces of Hades and Chaos. This baptismal conceptualization of the *descensus* tradition opens a way to the theological argumentation of the early church fathers and the creedal formulation in the following centuries. Clement of Alexandria, the first father who relates the *Descensus Christi* with 3:18-22 in the second century C.E., sees a way of the *Imitatio Christi* in the *Descensus Christi* because he thinks that even after their death the apostles followed Christ’s steps, the one who descended to Hades for preaching the gospel to release the “imprisoned souls.” This indicates that 1 Peter 3:18-22, combined with 4:6,

¹⁶² It is seen in the Wisdom of Solomon, 2 and 4 Maccabees, and the Odes of Solomon.

came to be interpreted as Christ's redemptive work in Hades which serves to redeem the lost souls rather than the superhuman rebels. According to Cullmann, Petrine Christology was dominated by the idea of the suffering servant and universalism.¹⁶³ Christ's baptism is seen as accomplished on the Cross.¹⁶⁴ As long as Christ's suffering/death is vindicated, the Christian sufferings under physical persecution or social pressure mean a way to the *Imitatio Christi*. The divine vindication is likely to develop and conceptualize the Christian mythical configuration of the *Descensus Christi ad Inferos*.

¹⁶³ Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, trans. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 69-78, argues for this, based on the Gospel of Mark, 1 and 2 Peter and the Petrine speeches of the Acts of Apostles, even though it is doubtful where the historical Peter can be traced from these.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 67. See also J. A. T. Robinson, "The One Baptism as a Category of New Testament Soteriology," *SJT* 6 (1953): 259.

CHAPTER 7

The *Descensus Christi ad Inferos* in Early Christianity

The Creedal Development of the *Descensus Christi*

In a northern Italian catalogue of heresies from Philastrius of Brescia, written around 380 C.E., the following passage against the doctrine of the *Descensus* is found:

Others are heretics because they claim that the Lord descended into hell, and that he again preached to all who were there after death, so that, assembling in faith there, they might be saved. Against this one can find the prophetic saying of David: "But who will believe in you in Hell?" And in the apostle: "As many who sinned without the law, will perish without the law."¹

Philastrius rejected the possibility of salvation for the already dead before the coming of Christ, recognizing the idea of the *Descensus Christi* as "an expansive theology"² that God's love is widened for the embrace of the already dead who are undeserving sinners.

In the middle of the fifteenth century C.E., Reginald Pecock, bishop of Saint Asaph and later of Chichester, refuted the doctrine of the descent to Hades, by appealing to the fact that the Apostles' Creed was not written by the apostles.³ Grudem disclaims any biblical proof text of the descent of Christ, while he argues that until 650 C.E. no early versions of the Creed that included

¹ Philastrius of Brescia, *Diversarum hereseon liber* in Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, ed. F. Heylen, vol. 9 (Turnholt: Typographi, 1957), 288-89, cited in Martin F. Connell, "*Descensus Christi Ad Inferos*: Christ's Descent to the Dead," *TS* 62 (2001): 265.

² Connell, "Descensus Christi," 266.

³ Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 5.

the creedal phrase of the *descensus* has been found except for Rufinus' *Commentary on the Apostles' Creed* written in 390 C.E., where he mentioned that the words, *descendit ad inferna* [or *inferos*], were already inserted in the old Roman creed used at his home church of Aquileia.⁴ But Philastrius' criticism against the "heretical" Christian group like the churches of Aquileia as well as the appearance of the "Fourth Formula"⁵ in the creed of the synods of Sirmium in 359 C.E., which might be influenced by the former because the church at Aquileia was of great antiquity,⁶ demonstrates that the idea of the descent of Christ had long since existed even before the creedal formulation.⁷ Interestingly, the only biblical reference given in the Sirmian phrase is Job 38:17: "Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?" The passage translated in the LXX, which was also cited from Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem and other contemporary writers, shows that the terror of the doorkeepers is implied in the destruction of the gates of Hades: πυλωροὶ δὲ ᾗδου ἰδόντες σε ἔπτηξαν (Job 38:17b).

As Kelly notes, by the second century C.E., the descent into Hades is a well-attested belief among the post-apostolic Fathers such as Ignatius of Antioch,

⁴ Wayne Grudem, "He Did Not Descend Into Hell: A Plea for Following Scripture instead of the Apostles' Creed," *JETS* 34/1 (1991): 103-13. It should be clarified here that the phrase of the *descensus* first appearing in creedal form occurred in the "Fourth Formula" of Sirmium 359 C.E.

⁵ The Sirmian fourth formula is that "ἀποθανόντα καὶ εἰς τὰ καταχθόνια κατελθόντα καὶ τὰ ἐκεῖσε οἰκονομήσαντα ὃν πυλωροὶ ᾗδου ἰδόντες ἔπριξαν.

⁶ MacCulloch, *Harrowing of Hell*, 69.

⁷ The formula also appears in the creed of Nike in the same year, and in that of Constantinople in 360 C.E, which are the Arian synods. See MacCulloch, 67. Rufinus and his bishop belong to the churches of Aquileia. The latter left the sermon at the Virgil, recounting the *Descensus Christi*.

Polycarp, Justin, Irenaeus, and Tertullian.⁸ Although the formula was lacking in the version of the Apostles' Creed used in Rome and elsewhere, the continuing works of the post-apostolic Fathers in the third and fourth centuries indicate that the descent of Christ to Hades had been mentioned as an important part of "the narrative of Christ's saving work for humanity and of God's generosity in rescuing the lost and those who had not heard the proclamation of the good news during their life in the world."⁹ Although the main point of controversy in theological debate has been whether Christ liberated all, the sinner and the just alike, whether he converted the sinner and the incredulous in Hades or liberated only those whose behavior in this life deserved salvation,¹⁰ Christ's descent itself had been long since confirmed by the early church fathers

It is significant that an anathema of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Council in 381 C.E. condemned those who denied that the Logos in His "reasonable soul" had descended to Hades.¹¹ Before the creedal formulation of the *Descensus Christi* around the second half of the fourth century C.E., it is certain that its theological consideration had begun with the early church fathers of the second

⁸ Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 379. See its references in Ignatius (*To the Magnesians* 9.2, *To the Trallians* 9.1), Polycarp (*To the Philippians* 1.2), Justin (*Dialogue with Trypho* 72), Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3.20.4; 4.22.1; 4.27.1; 5.31.1), and Tertullian (*De anima* 55).

⁹ Connell, "Descensus Christi," 264. It is suggested that the testimony is found in the second-century Eucharistic prayers of pseudo-Hippolytus and Melito of Sardis, and in the writings of Epiphanius and Hilary of Poitiers, and in the Alexandrians such as Clement, Origen, and Cyril. Other testimonies are found in the *Homilies* of Aphraates (ca. 337-45 C.E.), the *Acts of Thomas*, *On Our Lord* by Ephraim the Syrian, and the *Doctrine of Addai* that was quoted by Eusebius (*HE* 1.13). For more on the witness of the fathers to the descent, see H. Quilliet, "Descente de Jesus aux enfers," in *Dictionnaire de Theologie Catholique* 4/1 (Paris: n.p., 1924), 565-619.

¹⁰ Daniel Sheerin, "St. John the Baptist in the Lower World," *VC* 30 (1976): 2.

¹¹ MacCulloch, *Harrowing of Hell*, 71.

and third centuries.

The *Descensus Christi* in the Ante-Nicene Fathers

The Western Witnesses

1 Clement and the Shepherd of Hermas. The belief that Jesus' soul spent an interval in Hades during the *triduum mortis* is a common feature of Christian teaching from the time of the early church fathers.¹² In the Greco-Roman period, Hades never means the place of the wicked, i.e., *Tartaros*, but the dwelling of all souls in the afterlife, though the region of the blessed (*Elysium*) is thought of as a spatial division of the netherworld.¹³ The early Greek fathers took for granted the distinction of body and soul; thus they naturally thought of the activity of Christ's going to Hades in his soul after his physical death. It appears that "orthodox" Christians have accepted the idea that Christ's descent in some way was related to his continuing soteriological work to save the souls in Hades. It is argued that this idea originated from the concern of Jewish Christianity in dealing with the matter of the salvation of the righteous who died before the time of Christ during the Old Testament period.¹⁴ Thus the idea of the extension to

¹² MacCulloch, 45; Kelly, 379.

¹³ John Yates, "He Descended into Hell: Creed, Article and Scripture," part 1, *Churchman* 102/3 (1988): 242. In the history of ideas, the Greek started to compartmentalize the regions of Hades according to the fate of each soul (neutral; blessed; curable; incurable). See Homer, *Odyssey* 11; Plato, *Phaedo* 113-14, *Gorgias* 523-26.

¹⁴ Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 233-48.

the dead in Hades developed with the possibility of conversion, for salvation after death.

In the last decades of the first century C.E., Clement of Rome wrote a letter to the Corinthians (*1 Clement*).¹⁵ In this letter, he expresses an intermediate state of the old saints after death:

All the generation from Adam until this day have passed away; but those who were perfected in love by the grace of God have a place among the pious (χωρον ευσεβων) who shall be made manifest at the visitation of the Kingdom of Christ. For it is written, "Enter into thy chambers for a very little while, until my wrath and fury pass away, and I will remember a good day, and will raise you up out of your graves." (*1 Clement* 50.3-4)¹⁶

In this text, Clement assumes some place like Hades as the interim abode of the righteous dead since the time of Adam.¹⁷ According to this description, the "visitation of the Kingdom of Christ" will make manifest the righteous dead of the intermediate state. The Isaian phrase, the "chambers for a very little while," is used for the interim abode of the righteous dead, though the following passage points to the "grave." According to Hill's argument, the intermediate place for the righteous dead means a heavenly place rather than the subterranean Hades, since the martyred Peter went to the "the glorious place which was his due" and Paul was taken to the "holy place" (*1 Clement* 5.4-7).¹⁸ His whole argument, however, misses the point that the philosophical cosmology (earth-seven heavens-

¹⁵ Kirsopp Lake, trans., *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 3-5, concludes that the letter must be dated between 75 and 110 C.E.

¹⁶ Translation by K. Lake. Clement of Rome cites Isa. 26:20: "Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until the wrath is past."

¹⁷ Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 80.

¹⁸ Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 80-81

intelligible world) in late antiquity already had begun to consider the location of Hades in the middle of the heavens.¹⁹ Although, in this letter, it is unclear that the visitation of Christ's Kingdom means His descent to them in Hades, an almost-contemporaneous apostolic writing, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, clearly indicates the *Descensus Christi ad Inferos* in 9.16, where the apostles followed Christ's *descensus* to preach the good news to the dead, in the baptismal rite for the righteous dead.

Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses* and Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*. Irenaeus is considered one of the important heresiologists who influenced the later heresiologists such as Hippolytus, Epiphanius, and others. The polemical nature of Irenaeus as a heresiologist in the second century C.E. was considered to be of dubious historical value in the descriptions of his opponents.²⁰ Although he called his opponents "heretics" (*AH* 1.11.1; 4.26.2; 4.28.3; 5.20.2) or "Gnostics" (1.11.5; 3.11.1; 4.6.4; 4.33.3), this conceptual group did not exist as such in the second century around Irenaeus' times.

When Christianity came to be differently understood among Christians, as Christianity developed into the form of the institutional system under bishops, the "different opinions" (*haereses*) on the identity of the church and Christians,

¹⁹ Alan B. Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars: A History of an Idea* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 87, demonstrates that while the Stoics placed *Tartaros* in the air, Numenius placed it even higher in the planetary region. Around the turn of the era, the Jewish apocalyptic literature, especially, *2 Enoch* 42 and *3 Baruch* 4 locate Hades in the third heaven among the seven heavens; cf. Bauckham, *Fate of the Dead*, 54.

²⁰ Frederik Wisse, "The Nag Hammadi Library and the Heresiologists," *VC* 25 (1971): 206.

Christian lives, and worldview emerged as time went on. As the primacy of the Roman church came to the fore, all the Western churches followed this hierarchical and episcopal model of the Roman church whose system reflected the supremacy of the Roman emperor.²¹ The unity under one authority (the church under the power of a bishop) could be challenged by this emergence of “different opinions.” While the social shape of these “different opinions” is vague and uncertain, Irenaeus’ attempt to argue for “right opinions” (*orthodoxia*)²² reveals a glimpse of these different Christian groups in their social shapes within the church system.

When Irenaeus, who was a bishop responsible for the Gallic churches after being elevated to the bishopric of Lyons, in replacement of the martyred Pothinus in 177 C.E., was aware of the Valentinian challenge to the episcopal authority by way of forming “a church (pneumatic) within the church (psychic),” the immediate threat of the Valentinians in his own time should be responded to in terms of his defending the faith of the church.²³ For him, the Valentinian doctrine is the epitome of all the heresies (4.pref.2). He asserts that once the

²¹ James F. McCue, “The Roman Primacy in the Second Century and the Problem of the Development of Dogma,” *TS* 25 (1964): 161-96; Eric F. Osborn, “Reason and the Rule of Faith in the Second Century AD,” in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, ed. Rowan Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 49. For the primacy of the Roman church in *The Apostolic Fathers*, see Elaine H. Pagels, “The Demiurge and His Archons—A Gnostic View of the Bishop and Presbyters?,” *HTR* 69 (1976): 301-24.

²² The term *orthodoxia* was not used by Irenaeus, even though Eusebius of Caesarea introduced this Christian vocabulary a century later. See Richard A. Norris, “Heresy and Orthodoxy in the Later Second Century,” *USQR* 52 (1998): 45. The term “orthodox” is used in *AH* 5.31.1.

²³ For this apologetic agenda, he wrote a series of book, entitled as ἑλερχον καὶ ἀνατροπή τῆς ψευδώνυμου γνώσεως which is found in the prefaces in Book 2, 4, 5, and Eusebius’ *HE* 5.7.1. The short title πρὸς τὰς αἱρέσεις is also found in *HE* 2.13.5, 3.18.2, and 3.28.6.

Valentinians are refuted, the whole multitude of heretics is overthrown (2.31.2). For this apologetic purpose, Irenaeus uses the concept of the *regula veritatis* or *fidei*²⁴ as an ideological means to defend his episcopal position, appealing to the antiquity of the apostolic tradition on which the faith of the universal church relies.

It has been noted that the rule of faith developed out of the baptismal confession.²⁵ It seems that Irenaeus talks about the rule of faith in the baptismal context in the first place, for the Christian believers begin their new life with baptism.²⁶ In another work, the *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (or *Epideixis*), he includes the three articles of the baptismal confessions of the Triune God within the body of the rule of faith (chs. 3-7). For Irenaeus, the rule of faith means following the preaching of the truth as a way of following the way of life, which is the human response to the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, its content functions as a confessional manifesto that should be narrated at the point of baptism.

While Irenaeus rejects the Gnostics as the novelties of heretics who arrived too late for access to the original truth (3.4.2), he includes under the rule of faith “the plain teaching of Scripture, the doctrine preached by the apostles.”²⁷ Compared with the Gnostic novelties, Irenaeus traces back the origin of the *regula fidei* to the times of the apostles, by the apostolic link of a group of

²⁴ For references to the rule of truth (or faith), see *AH* 1.10.1; 1.22.1; 2.11.1; 2.28.1; 2.30.9; 3.3.3; 3.4.2; 3.11.7; 3.15.3; 3.16.6; 4.35.4.

²⁵ Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan, 2nd ed. vol. 2 (London: Williams & Norgate, 1896), 20.

²⁶ *AH*. 1.9.4. Irenaeus contends that the rule of truth is “received through baptism.”

²⁷ Osborn, “Reason and the Rule of Faith,” 43.

predecessors whom he calls “the presbyters”(πρεσβύτερος, *seniors*, 1.15.6; 2.22.5; 4.27.1; 4.32.1; 5.5.1; 5.17.4; 5.33.3; 5.36.1-3; *Epideixis* 3; 61).²⁸ The antiquity of the *regula fidei* is contrasted with the human speculations or opinions (αἵρεσις) which are recently made (5.20.1). In the argument, Irenaeus several times quotes their sayings which exert an important authority on his appeal to the past. Van Unnik points out that “these presbyters serve as key-figures in certain areas of the church in that age of transition, which is the second century, still encompassed in many places by the clouds of historical darkness.”²⁹ Irenaeus refers to them as “one superior to me or us” (1.pref.2; 1.13.3; 3.17.4) or “predecessors—much superior men to me” (4.pref.2).³⁰

One of the theological confusions arising from the tension between his “orthodox” churches and the Valentinian Gnostics is the existence of the afterlife for the saints. While the Valentinians assert the soul’s direct return to heaven because of its nature of immortality, rejecting bodily resurrection, Irenaeus even stresses Christ’s descent into Hades to observe the “law of the dead” (*lex mortuorum*) and thereby all saints should go to Hades where they wait for the bodily resurrection:

If, then, the Lord observed the law of the dead, that He might become the first-begotten from the dead, and tarried until the third day “in the lower parts of the earth;” then afterwards rising in the flesh, so that He even showed the

²⁸ The presbyters are called “the disciples of the apostles in *AH* 4.32.1, 5.5.1, and 5.36.2.

²⁹ Willem C. van Unnik, “The Authority of the Presbyters in Irenaeus’ Works,” in *God’s Christ and His People: Studies in Honor of Nils Alstrup Dahl*, ed. Jacob Jervell and Wayne A. Meeks (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1977), 249.

³⁰ It has been surmised that this group or man superior to Irenaeus could be his martyred predecessor Pothinus, or his early mentor Polycarp, or his literary model Justin, or Papias the hearer of John.

print of the nails to His disciples, He thus ascended to the Father; [if all these things occurred, I say], how must these men not be put to confusion, who allege that “the lower parts” refer to this world of ours, but that their inner man, leaving the body here, ascends into the super-celestial place? For as the Lord “went away in the midst of the shadow of death,” where the souls of the dead were, yet afterwards arose in the body, and after the resurrection was taken up [into heaven], it is manifest that the souls of His disciples also, upon whose account the Lord underwent these things, shall go away into the invisible place allotted to them by God, and there remain until the resurrection, awaiting that event; then receiving their bodies, and rising in their entirety, that is bodily, just as the Lord arose, they shall come thus into the presence of God. (AH 5.31.2)³¹

Irenaeus rejects the Valentinian interpretation of Eph. 4:9 that “the lower parts of the earth” refers to this world. He believes that all souls should go to the physical Hades which has been traditionally considered as located under the earth, while the Gnostics identify it with the material world. This Valentinian understanding of the interim state of the righteous souls in heaven, not in the subterranean Hades, originates from the soul’s immortality and its repose in the intelligible world as the goal of the soul’s journey.³² The polemical point of Irenaeus is that God the Creator cares for the flesh as well as the soul for one’s final redemption.

Irenaeus follows Justin, who first came to criticize the Valentinian journey of the soul, which does not need the righteous dead to stay in Hades:

For if you have fallen in with some who are called Christians, but who do

³¹ Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1953), 560.

³² Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 17, points out that Irenaeus allowed for the admittance of Christians into heaven before resurrection, in AH 3.16.4 where the innocent martyrs killed by Herod were sent before into His kingdom. This text and 4.33.9 intimate that the martyred soul could be sent directly to heaven, as in the thought of Tertullian.

not admit this [truth], and venture to blaspheme the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; who say there is no resurrection of the dead, and that their souls, when they die, are *taken to heaven*; do not imagine that they are Christians, even as one, if he would rightly consider it, would not admit that the Sadducees, or similar sects of Genist, Meristae, Galilaeans, Hellenists, Pharisees, Baptists, are Jews (do not hear me impatiently when I tell you what I think), but are [only] called Jews and children of Abraham, worshipping God with the lips, as God Himself declared, but the heart was far from Him. But I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged, the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare.³³

Justin asserts that to “remain in Hades” is the lot of the “common mortal,” while Christ could not be held in Hades after death (*Dialogue* 99). While Justin has an ambivalent position between the notion that all souls remained in Hades for judgment and that the righteous souls are with God in heaven, the latter position is mainly concerned with the martyred souls (*1 Apology* 10.2-3; 11; 57.3), a view like that held by Irenaeus and Tertullian.³⁴

Another important reason for the Valentinian rejection of Christ’s descent into Hades is related with their Christological view in which Christ has no material element because material substance is incapable of receiving salvation (*AH* 1.6.1).³⁵

³³ Justin Martyr, “Dialogue with Trypho” in the *Ante-Nice Fathers*, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 239.

³⁴ Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 17-18, 26, argues that Justin, Irenaeus, and Tertullian take this ambivalent attitude to the intermediate state of the dead in their early or late careers. But both Justin and Tertullian integrate the ambivalent position in terms of the perspective that only the martyred souls can ascend to heaven to be with God, but all other souls descend to Hades.

³⁵ Cf. *AH* 1.7.2. According to Irenaeus’ description of Ptolemaeus’ Valentinianism (*AH* 1.1-8), Christ Jesus has four elements of spirit, psyche, the aeon Economy, and the aeon Savior, which separates the passible Jesus from the impassible Christ. Later,

The theme of Christ's descent into Hades to proclaim salvation to the righteous dead is described for the first time in an apocryphal saying attributed to the prophet Jeremiah, which is cited by Justin and Irenaeus (*Epideixis* 78; *AH* 3.20.4; 4.22.1, 33.1, 12; 5.31.1).³⁶ Justin cites a now lost apocryphal saying, which he charges the Jews with having removed from a sacred text of Jeremiah, used by the early Christians as messianic proof texts.³⁷

And again from the sayings of the same Jeremiah these have been cut out: "The Lord God remembered His dead people of Israel who lay in the graves; and He descended to preach to them His own salvation. (*Dialogue with Trypho* 72.4)

Though Irenaeus has some confusion about the authorship of this apocryphal saying,³⁸ he surely knows of this saying, passed on to him from the early church. He maintains that he is a witness to the teaching of the apostolic predecessor before him. The dependence of Irenaeus' argument on the teachings of the presbyters is one way of his shortening the chain of tradition between Jesus and himself. Most of his citing or quoting of the presbyters' words are from their witnesses and learning of Jesus' life and teaching or the apostolic writings, with

Cerinthus (*AH* 1.26.1), the western Valentinians (Hippolytus, *Refutation* 6.30; 7.33; 10.21), and Paul of Samosata developed the dichotomy between Jesus and Christ.

³⁶ Landes, "Matthew 12:40," 673. For the thorough study of this saying, see Gschwind, *Die Niederfahrt Christi in die Unterwelt*, 199-227.

³⁷ Landes, "Matthew 12:40," 673.

³⁸ Irenaeus attributes it once to Jeremiah (*AH* 4.22.1; *Epid.* 78), once to Isaiah (3.20.4), and again to the "prophet" (5.31.1), the "others" (4.33.12), or without reference to authorship (4.33.1). Werner Bieder, *Die Vorstellung von der Höllenfahrt Jesu Christi: Beitrag zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Vorstellung vom sog. Descensus ad inferos* (Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1949), 152, argues that the descendent tradition was linked to Jeremiah because of the prophet's experience of suffering in the pit, in Jer. 38:6 (45:6 in the LXX).

the study of the Old Testament for the church and with certain eschatological teachings, in the train of tradition (the Lord—the disciples—presbyters).³⁹ When the *regula fidei* is described as the apostolic tradition, it means “one and the same faith” (*AH* 5.20.1) which is not defiled or adulterated by adding or omitting. The recurrent reference to the presbyters’ eyewitness (“saw and heard”) implies more historical trustworthiness than his opponents, the Valentinian Gnostics. In this regard, Irenaeus appeals to the apostolic tradition of the teaching of “Christ’s descent to Hades,” whether he depends on his memory or the written tradition:

As I have heard from a certain presbyter, who had heard it from those who had seen the apostles, and from those who had been their disciples, the punishment [declared] in Scripture was sufficient for the ancients in regard to what they did without the Spirit’s guidance... The Scripture has thus sufficiently reproved him, as the presbyter remarked, in order that no flesh may glory in the sight of the Lord... It was for this reason, too, that the Lord descended into the regions beneath the earth, preaching His advent there also, and [declaring] the remission of sins received by those who believe in Him. Now all those believed in Him who had hope towards Him, that is, those who proclaimed His advent, and submitted to His dispensations, the righteous men, the prophets, and the patriarchs, to whom He remitted sins in the same way as He did to us, which sins we should not lay to their charge, if we would not despise the grace of God. (*AH* 4.27.1-2)⁴⁰

Irenaeus simply emphasizes the apostolic teaching of Christ’s descent into Hades, which functions as the *regula fidei* against the Valentinian teaching of the journey of the soul which excludes the fleshly resurrection from God’s redemption. For Irenaeus, the *lex mortuorum* (the law of the dead)) should be emphasized for the preparation of the fleshly resurrection. Furthermore, the extended grace of God for the old saints in Hades, which is of concern in *1 Clement* and the

³⁹ Unnik, 255.

⁴⁰ *ANF*, 1:498-99.

Shepherd of Hermas, was accomplished by the *Descensus Christi*. This teaching is clearly manifested in his baptismal teaching in *Epideixis* 78:

And in Jeremias He thus announces His death and descent into hell, in the words: And the Lord the Holy One of Israel bethought Him of His dead, who in the past had slept in the dust of the earth, and went down unto them, to bring the good news of salvation, to deliver them. Here He also gives the reason for His death; for His descent into hell was salvation for the departed.⁴¹

What is significant in Irenaeus' witness to the apostolic teaching of Christ's descent into Hades is that he is one theological and personal link between the East and the West. Irenaeus, true to his name, wrote an irenic letter to Victor, bishop of Rome, who had tried to excommunicate the Asiatic churches because of their practice of commemorating the *Pascha* on 14 Nisan according to the Jewish calendar;⁴² Irenaeus deplored the force of Victor upon the churches in Asia Minor, by saying that the latter excommunicated those churches of God for following a tradition of ancient custom.⁴³ Eusebius described Irenaeus as a "peacemaker" (εἰρηνοποιός) both by name⁴⁴ and by very character, who made exhortations for the peace of the churches and acted as the church's ambassador" (*HE* 5.24.18).

Irenaeus, elder of the church, became the bishop of Lyons in 177 C.E.,

⁴¹ Translation from Joseph P. Smith, *St. Irenaeus: Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1952), 97. This long lost work of Irenaeus has been found only in an Armenian version in 1904.

⁴² This is the so-called the Quartodeciman controversy.

⁴³ Eusebius, *HE* 5.24. Translation from Roy J. Deferrari, *Eusebius Pamphili: Ecclesiastical History, Books 1-5* (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1953), 334-39.

⁴⁴ The Greek form of his name, Εἰρηναῖος, is from εἰρήνη (peace).

after the persecution of the Gallic churches of Vienne and Lyons.⁴⁵ His experience as an ambassador of church peace between the East and the West⁴⁶ before or after his being in charge of the southern Gallic churches in the last decade of the second century C.E. made him more connected to the Asiatic churches in the spiritual and apostolic connection with Asia Minor.⁴⁷ It appears that Irenaeus' connection with the Asiatic churches came from the fact that he was a native of Asia Minor and had resided for a time at least in or near Smyrna, for twice he referred to having seen and heard the aged Polycarp of Smyrna, at a young age, who later became a spiritual and apostolic mentor for Irenaeus (AH 3.3.4). Like his predecessor, Pothinus, who was a native of Asia Minor, Irenaeus' geographical connection with Asia Minor seemed to be welcomed by the Asiatic churches that needed theological and spiritual support from the Gallic churches in defense against the suspicion of the Roman bishop over their practice of the different date of Easter and the issue of Montanism.

In the East, especially Asia Minor and Alexandria, before and after Irenaeus, the teaching of the *Descensus Christi* has been recognized and confirmed among the early fathers. Irenaeus of Lyons, who emigrated from Asia Minor and

⁴⁵ The persecution story of the Gallic churches in the last quarter of the second century is preserved by Eusebius who quotes a lengthy letter which was sent from "the servants of Christ sojourning in Vienne and Lyons in Gaul to the brethren in Asia and Phrygia who have the same faith and hope of redemption as we" (HE 5.1.3).

⁴⁶ The Gallic churches sent Irenaeus as ambassador to Eleutherus, bishop of Rome, who was about to interfere with the conflict between Montanists and the local bishops of Asia Minor, after the churches of Asia Minor asked the Gallic churches for the support of their position against the Montanist movement (HE 5.4.1).

⁴⁷ Morton S. Enslin, "Irenaeus: Mostly Prolegomena," *HTR* 40 (1947): 158, argues that Eusebius' description of Irenaeus as a presbyter at the time of being sent to Rome was wrongly differentiated from "bishop" because he had already succeeded Pothinus.

learned from their theological traditions, became a protagonist for the teaching of Christ's descent which should be taught as *regula fidei*, while he also witnessed to Marcion's distortion of the teaching of Christ's descent.⁴⁸

Hippolytus and Tertullian. Hippolytus of Rome clearly indicates in his works that Christ descended into Hades to preach the gospel to the souls in Hades, during His death. In his treatise on *Christ and Antichrist*, he stresses the authority and power of Christ even in the realm of the dead, dependent on the biblical passages (Phil. 2:10; 1 Pet. 3:19):

He showed all power given by the Father to the Son, who is ordained Lord of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth, and Judge of all: of things in heaven, because He was born, the Word of God, before all (ages); and of things on earth, because He became man in the midst of men, to re-create our Adam through Himself; and of things under the earth, because He was also reckoned among the dead, preaching the Gospel to the souls of the saints, (and) by death overcoming death. (*De antichr.* 26)⁴⁹

After this, at the Jordan, seeing the Savior with his own eye, he points Him out, and says, "Behold the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world!" He [John the Baptist] also first preached to those in Hades, becoming a forerunner there when he was put to death by Herod, that there too he might intimate that the Savior would descend to ransom the souls of the saints from the hand of death. (*De antichr.* 45)

The second passage refers to John the Baptist as a forerunner of Christ's descent to redeem the souls in Hades. This strange reference to the role of John the

⁴⁸ AH 1.27.3 demonstrates that Marcion teaches that Abel, Enoch, Noah, their righteous descendents, and the patriarchs did not listen to Christ's preaching in Hades because of their suspicion of the tempting *Demiurgos* and thereby remained in Hades, without being redeemed by Christ's descent.

⁴⁹ Hippolytus, "Treatise on Christ and Antichrist," in the *Ante-Nice Fathers*, vol. 5, *Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix*, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 209.

Baptist in Hades is later articulated in Origen's commentary on John and homily on Luke. Hippolytus' other works speak of Christ's descent to save the dead prophets, martyrs, and apostles, which is found to be an important soteriological work of Christ in Hades.⁵⁰ In his fragment of the work on the *Holy Pasch*, preserved in Syriac and cited by Nicetas, Hippolytus refers to an *apocryphon* which is fully quoted by Clement (*Strom.* 6.6) to express the idea of the descent into Hades:

*We have not seen His form, but we have heard His voice. Therefore it became Him, that when He went to Hades, He preached to those there, who in this life had not allowed themselves to be conceived. On that account, therefore, the doorkeepers of Hades trembled and He broke and destroyed the gates of Hades, and the iron doors and bolts were broken.*⁵¹

His contemporaries in Alexandria, Clement and Origen, have taught the same doctrine of Christ's descent to Hades in their works.

Tertullian believes that Hades is a "secret inner recess which is hidden in the earth, and enclosed by the earth, and superimposed on the abysmal depths which lie still lower down."⁵² He emphasizes that Christ obeyed the law of the dead by going to Hades in the form and condition of a dead man, just as in Irenaeus' argument. The reason for His descent to Hades is to "make the patriarchs and prophets partakers of Himself."⁵³ Tertullian concludes that all souls must be kept in Hades until the fleshly resurrection takes place before the final

⁵⁰ See, MacCulloch, *Harrowing of Hell*, 96-97, demonstrates the evidence of Hippolytus' teaching on Christ's descent to Hades, from the fragments entitled "Holy Pasch," "Upon the Great Ode," "On the End of the World," and "On the Universe."

⁵¹ Hippolytus, περὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πάσχα. The translation is from MacCulloch, 96. The sentence in italic is mine to indicate the *apocryphon*.

⁵² *De anima* 55.

⁵³ *De anima* 55.

judgment (*De anima* 58). For him, only martyred souls could go directly to Paradise, without being sent to Hades.⁵⁴ Rejecting the philosopher's idea of the journey of the soul, he asserts that Hades is not emptied because all souls should go there, waiting for bodily resurrection. Clearly, Tertullian witnesses to the teaching of Christ's descent into Hades, arguing for his Christian doctrine of the soul.

The Eastern Witnesses

Ignatius and Polycarp. The earliest patristic reference to Christ's descent to Hades appears in the letter of Ignatius of Antioch. In his letter to the Magnesians, he writes:

How shall we be able to live without him of whom the prophets also were disciples in the spirit, him to whom they looked forward as their teacher? And therefore he for whom they rightly waited came and raised them from the dead.⁵⁵

Ignatius argues for Christ's descent to Hades against the docetic Judaizer's denial of Jesus' death (*Magn.* 9.1), while he emphasizes the reality of Jesus' physical suffering and death as a polemic against docetic Christology.⁵⁶ The concern for the old saints or prophets who have waited for Christ's coming and should be saved by Him is also seen in his letter to the Philadelphians:

And we also love the prophets because they also made their proclamation

⁵⁴ Tertullian takes the cases of John's seeing only martyred souls now in heaven in the book of Revelation and Perpetua's vision of fellow-martyrs in heaven.

⁵⁵ Ignatius, *Magnesians* 9.2. Translation from William R. Schoedel, *A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 123.

⁵⁶ See his letters, *Trallians* 9-10; *Smyrnaeans* 2-3; *Magnesians* 11.

with the gospel in view and trust their hope in him and waited for him, in whom by believing they were also saved, being in the unity of Jesus Christ, saints worthy of love and worthy of admiration, attested by Jesus Christ and numbered together in the gospel of the common hope. (5.2)

For Ignatius, the salvation of the old saints before Christ's coming is understood implicitly as the occasion of Christ's descent to Hades.

Another witness to the teaching of Christ's descent is found in Polycarp's Letter to the Philippians.⁵⁷ He implicitly refers to Peter's sermon on Christ's death overpowering the pains of death (Acts 2:24). From this letter, it is known that Polycarp follows the language of Ignatius, Clement, and Paul in his eschatology:

..., being assured that all these [Ignatius, Zosimus, Rufus, and others who are martyred] have not run in vain, but in faith and uprightness, and they are in the due place with the Lord (εἰς τὸν ὀφειλόμενον αὐτοῖς τόπον εἰσὶ παρὰ τῷ κυρίῳ), with whom they suffered. (9.2)⁵⁸

Shared with Ignatius, Polycarp sees the martyred souls as now being with Christ who also united the righteous dead with His presence.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ 1.2: "and because the deep root of your faith, which has been renowned from early times, still lasts and bears fruit to our Lord Jesus Christ, who for our sins endured even facing death, and whom God raised, setting aside the pains of death." Translation from Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Apostolic Fathers: An American Translation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), 239. Cf., the latter part of Acts 2:24 which is not cited here refers to the implied descent of Christ in that the power of death cannot hold Christ in Hades.

⁵⁸ Such language as "due place" (*1 Clement* 5.7), "with the Lord" (*Smyr.* 4.2; *Phil.* 1:23), "not in vain" (*Phil.* 2:16) points to the apostolic influences on Polycarp, whose eschatology is related with "personal eschatology" rather than "apocalyptic eschatology." Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 91, argues that Polycarp is a non-chilist who argues for the intermediate heavenly state of the saints.

⁵⁹ Polycarp requested in chapter 12 that God grant the Philippians and himself "a part and lot with his saints" (12.2).

Clement of Alexandria. Although the “Fourth Formula of Sirmium” in 359 C.E. first occurred in creedal form, which had the phrase of Christ’s descent into Hades, its only scriptural reference given is Job 38:17. While there is ample evidence of belief in the descent of Christ into Hades in the early patristic period, the scriptural reference to 1 Peter 3:18-22, relating it to the descent to Hades, had been known since the time of Clement, Origen, and Cyril in Alexandria as well as Hippolytus.⁶⁰

Clement has a wider view of the descent into Hades, since he includes “righteous pagans” at least, as well as the saints of the Old Testament, among those who are benefited by the preaching in Hades. He quotes the passage from the *Shepherd of Hermas*,⁶¹ when he applies the possibility of the second penitence to the already dead even before Christ’s coming:

The Shepherd quite simply, in speaking of the dead, knows that there were people of righteousness among gentiles and Jews, not just before the Lord’s coming but before the time of the Law, people who pleased God, like Abel, Noah, and others, who were righteous. Anyway, he says that the apostles and disciples who preached the name of God’s Son, and have been laid to rest, have preached, in power and faith, to those who were laid to rest before their lifetime. Then he goes on: “And they gave them the *seal* about which they were preaching. So with them they went down into the water

⁶⁰ Reicke, *Disobedient Spirits*, 14. He adds that early commentators such as P. J. Jensen and K. Gschwind omitted the text of Hippolytus, only mentioning the Alexandrians. See also Friedrich Loofs, “Descent to Hades (Christ’s),” in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1981), 648-63.

⁶¹ This book belongs generically to the group of apocalyptic or prophetic writings but is traditionally counted among the so-called *Apostolic Fathers*. In this, a preaching in Hades is ascribed to the apostles and teachers: “These having fallen asleep before, and they gave the seal of the preaching to them.” For the use of the *Shepherd* in Clement and Origen, see Annewies van Den Hoek, “Clement and Origen as Sources on ‘Noncanonical’ Scriptural Traditions during the Late Second and Earlier Third Centuries,” in *Origeniana Sexta, Actes du Colloquium Origenianum Sextum*, 1993, ed. Gilles Dorival and Alain le Boulluec (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), 93-114.

and rose again living. The others who had died beforehand went down dead but rose up alive. They were brought to life and knowledge of the name of God's Son through the apostles and disciples. That is the way they rose up together with these, and found a fitting place together in the building of the tower, and together were built into the construction without need of knapping. They had gone to rest in righteousness and purity. All they lacked was the seal."⁶²

Even though the *Shepherd of Hermas* has in view only the righteous of the Hebrew Bible to be preached to in Hades, *Hermas* and Clement share the idea of the evangelization of the dead in that those who have their residence in Hades should be acquainted with the gospel so that the just people, who died before the coming of Christ, should be baptized to be saved by the apostles (*Hermas* 9.16.6) or Christ himself (Clement).

Clement's interest in the beneficiary of the preaching in Hades is extended to those righteous pagans, "righteous according to philosophy" (*Strom.* 6.6), while the earlier church fathers like Ignatius, Polycarp, and Justin have in mind only the people of Israel as the beneficiaries of Christ's preaching in Hades. Clement's extended scope for the beneficiaries of the preaching in Hades is in accordance with his more liberal and generous attitude toward Greek philosophy.⁶³ As McGiffert notes, "almost at the beginning of *Stromateis*, Clement insists that philosophy came from God and was given to the Greeks as a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ as the law was a schoolmaster for the Hebrews."⁶⁴ Clement

⁶² Clement, *Strom.* 2.43.5-44.3. Translation from John Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria: Stromateis Book One to Three* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 188. Clement cites the *Shepherd of Hermas* 9.16.5-7.

⁶³ See Salvatore R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 13, 57.

⁶⁴ Arthur C. McGiffert, *The Apostle's Creed: Its Origin, Its Purpose and Its Historical*

continues to add what the extended ministry of Christ after death means for human salvation:

If, then, the Lord descended to Hades for no other end but to preach the Gospel, as He did descend; it was either to preach the Gospel to all or to the Hebrews only. If, accordingly, to all, then all who believe shall be saved, although they may be of the Gentiles, on making their profession there; since God's punishments are *saving and disciplinary, leading to conversion*,⁶⁵ and choosing rather the repentance than the death of a sinner; and especially since souls, although darkened by passions, when released from their bodies, are able to perceive more clearly, because of their being no longer obstructed by the paltry flesh. (*Strom.* 6.6)⁶⁶

For there are partial corrections, which are called chastisements... But as children are chastised by their teacher, or their father, so are we by Providence. But God does not punish, for punishment is retaliation for evil. He chastises, however, for good to those who are chastised, collectively and individually. (*Strom.* 7.16)

For Clement, the justification of the doctrine of the *Descensus Christi* is closely related with his idea that God's punishments in Hades are "saving and disciplinary, leading to conversion." His belief that the punishment in Hades is disciplinary and remedial, not merely punitive and retaliatory, lays the theological groundwork for the doctrine of universalism which is more fully developed in Origen.⁶⁷ He based his argument on the *Shepherd of Hermas* and 1 Peter 3:19-

Interpretation; A Lecture/with Critical Notes (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), 183; cf. *Strom.* 1.5.28

⁶⁵ Italics are mine for emphasis.

⁶⁶ Translation from "The Stromata or Miscellanies," in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 490-91.

⁶⁷ William C. Finch, *The Descent into Hades: An Exegetical, Historical, and Theological Study*, Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1940 (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1988) 145-46.

20. Interestingly, Clement claims that the apostles preached the gospel to those in Hades as a way of *Imitatio Christi* (*Strom.* 6.6). This imitation that he regards as necessary in Hades is just as it was on earth; just as Christ brought to repentance those of the Hebrews, so do the apostles those of the Gentiles—those who lived righteously according to the Law or philosophy, “who ended life not perfectly but sinfully.”⁶⁸

Origen’s Interpretation of the Petrine Passage for the *Descensus Christi*.

Origen speaks of the *Descensus* in his book, *Contra Celsum*, in which he argues for the truth of the descent of Christ into Hades against Celsus, a Stoic and anti-Christian philosopher, who says that the stories of the descent of heroes – Orpheus, Protesilaos, Hercules, Theseus – to Hades and their return are juggling impossibilities, and Christ’s Descent is no better (*Cels.* 2.56).⁶⁹ Celsus clearly knew of the Christian tradition of the *Descensus Christi*, when he made a point that Jesus’ preaching to the dead in Hades demonstrated His failure in persuading (πείσας) people on earth. Origen argues against Celsus’ attack:

Even if he [Celsus] dislikes it, we maintain this, that he was in the body, he convinced not merely a few, but so many that the multitude of those persuaded by him led to the conspiracy against him; and that when he became a soul unclothed by a body (γυμνῇ σώματος γενόμενος ψυχῇ), he conversed with souls unclothed by bodies (ταῖς γυμναῖς σωμάτων ψυχαῖς), converting also those who were willing to accept him, or those who, for reasons which he himself knew, he saw to be ready to do so.” (2.43)⁷⁰

⁶⁸ *Strom.* 6.6

⁶⁹ John Granger Cook, *The Interpretation of the New Testament in Greco-Roman Paganism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 54-55. Originally published, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000.

⁷⁰ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University

Origen adds that the history of Jesus' resurrection from the dead cannot be compared with such as the Greek tales of the heroes' descents to and return from Hades because Jesus was crucified in public as a historical fact (2.56).

The descent of Christ into Hades is an essential and significant feature of Origen's universalism because the idea of Christ's descent into Hades is a key for him to explain how God extends his salvation to all human beings beyond ages and places. Thus, Origen frequently refers to this descent, based on 1 Peter 3:19-20, citing both Old and New Testament passages, by substantiating it and adding a good many extraneous details. The theme of the extension of salvation to the dead in the underworld as an economy of universal salvation was suggested as a parallel economy of salvation preached to the living in this world.⁷¹

1. Prophets and John the Baptist as Precursors in Hades.

From the notion of a parallel economy of salvation, a notion of a pre-evangelization, a parallel preparation for the evangelization of the underworld for whomsoever extended, of those who died before Christ, could be easily derived.⁷²

Origen demonstrates that the prophecy takes place in the world of the dead as well as that of the living. For example, according to Origen's *Commentary on Matthew*, Moses and Elijah in the scene of Jesus' Transfiguration are described as carrying the good news of

Press, 1980), 99-100.

⁷¹ Daniel Sheerin, "St. John the Baptist in the Lower World," *VC* 30 (1976): 2-3.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 4.

Jesus' words to their fellow prisoners in Hades.⁷³ The existence of the prophets of the Old Testament in Hades seemed to vex the early church fathers and commentators. The story of Saul, Samuel, and the witch of Endor in 1 Samuel 28 is a good example. Some patristic exegetes, such as Tertullian, Jerome, Eustathius, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine tried to escape the oddness of the literal meaning of the text, in appealing to their interpretations: either sorcery is just demonic deceit, and what appeared was not really Samuel, but a demon in his guise; or, Samuel was not really in Hades but had been sent by God to announce Saul's fate.⁷⁴ This kind of evasive interpretation of the literal meaning of the text is due to the doctrinal oddness that the prophets existed in Hades. Only Origen among all the major commentators took this text literally in terms of bringing to the story the typological perspective used for Christ's preaching to the dead in the underworld.

In his *Homily on 1 Kings 28*,⁷⁵ Origen disputes with those who would question the veracity of the report of the conjuring up of Samuel by the witch of Endor and further deny that the prophets and Christ descended into Hades. He, however, argues that the prophets descended into Hades to prophesy Christ's coming:

So the Savior came down in order to save. Has he or has he not come down there as proclaimed by the Prophets? But was he proclaimed by the Prophets, and yet elsewhere he does not come down through the Prophets?... Jesus appeared in Hades, and the Prophets before him, and they proclaimed the coming of Christ.⁷⁶

⁷³ Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 12.43

⁷⁴ Patricia Cox, "Origen and the Witch of Endor: Toward an Iconoclastic Typology," *ATR* 66 (1984): 139. For more details of the interpretation history, see Klaas A. D. Smelik, "The Witch of Endor: 1 Samuel 28 in Rabbinic and Christian Exegesis Till 800 A.D.," *VC* 33 (1977): 160-79.

⁷⁵ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah, Homilies on 1 Kings 28*, trans. John Clark Smith (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998). As Origen uses the LXX, when he refers to 1 Kings, it will point to 1 Samuel for the modern readers.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 326-27.

Origen stays almost entirely with the historical or literal text from beginning to end in this homily of 1 Samuel 28 because the doctrine of the *Descensus* underlies his exegetical work. He addresses the important issue to his audience, by asking, “Why do you fear to say that every place has need of Jesus Christ?” The rejection of the idea of Christ in Hades, or the prophets and saints of the Old Testament in Hades, is conceived as “fear,” originating from its doctrinal oddness. Origen, however, asserts that every place, including Hades, is filled with those who need salvation. It is the reason why Christ descended into Hades. For this wonderful news, the prophets came into Hades before Christ: “Those who have need of Christ have need of the Prophets. But if he has no need of Christ, he has no need of those who prepare for the appearance and dwelling of Christ.”⁷⁷ At this point, Origen introduces John the Baptist as the last of many precursors (πρόδρομοι) of Christ, by suggesting that as the world of the living required prophecy and a preparation for Christ’s coming, so too did the world of the dead.⁷⁸

Origen treats of John the Baptist at length in two places: the *Commentary on John* and the *Homilies on Luke*. In the former, Origen emphasizes John’s functions.⁷⁹ John is the type of the Old Testament; he is the forerunner and witness to every manifestation (ἐπίνοια) of Christ; and he preexists in a distinctive way. Interestingly, Origen sees John as an angel incarnate so that he can be everywhere and a forerunner. John’s soul,

⁷⁷ *Hom. 2 in 1 Reg.* in *Patrologia Graeca* 12, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, 1023ff, cited in McCulloch, 104.

⁷⁸ Sheerin, 5.

⁷⁹ Joseph T. Lienhard, “Origen’s Speculation on John the Baptist or Was John the Baptist the Holy Spirit,” in *Origeniana Quinta: Historica, Text and Method, Biblica, Philosophica, Theologica, Origenism and Later Developments: Papers of the 5th International Origen Congress, Boston College, 14-18 August 1989*, ed. Robert J. Daly (Leuven: Peeters, 1992), 451.

“being older than his body” (Book 2, 181) and “sent from heaven” (Book 2, 176) became incarnated. And he died before Jesus and announced to the dead Christ’s coming to deliver them:

But even before the testimonies here, the Baptist’s leaping in joy in the womb of Elizabeth at Mary’s greeting was a testimony about Christ. He was testifying to the divinity of Christ’s conception and birth. For what indeed is John, except everywhere a witness and forerunner of Jesus? He precedes his birth, and dies a little before the death of the Son of God, that, by appearing before the Christ not only to those in birth, but also to those awaiting freedom from death through Christ, he might everywhere prepare for the Lord a prepared people. (*Com. John* 2.224)⁸⁰

In the later works, the *Homily on Luke* and the *Commentary on Matthew*, Origen becomes cautious in dealing with the nature of John Baptist.⁸¹ Whatever the nature of John the Baptist is, Origen considers only one point in John’s role: John serves as a precursor of Christ. As a precursor, John not only announces Jesus’ coming on earth, but also heralds Christ’ descent to Hades and prepares the souls of all who are going to believe in Christ:

So the spirit [the Holy Spirit, but not Elijah’s soul] that had been in Elijah came upon John as well, and the power that Elijah has also appeared in John. Elijah was carried off to heaven. John was the Lord’s precursor and died before him so that he could go down to the underworld and proclaim his coming. (*Homily on Luke* 4.5)⁸²

Origen makes a significant theological point of what is meant by Christ’s

⁸⁰ Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John Books 1-10*, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 155.

⁸¹ Lienhard argues that while Origen’s treatment of John as an angel incarnate was more speculative and ambiguous in *Com. John*, in the later works he denies that John was a reincarnated soul of Elijah or consubstantial with the divine nature as wholly pneumatic.

⁸² Origen, *Homilies on Luke, Fragments on Luke*, trans. Joseph T. Lienhard (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 19.

appearing (descending) to the world in the commentary on the Gospel of John (1:26-27),⁸³ where John the Baptist is saying, "among you stands one whom you do not know, even he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."

Origen wonders: What are Jesus' sandals? And he answers: "I think that the incarnation, when the Son of God took flesh and bone, constitutes one of the sandals, and the descent into Hades and the voyage into Hades and the voyage in spirit unto the prison is the other."⁸⁴ Origen directly relates its interpretation to Ps. 15:10, Rom. 14:9, and 1 Pet. 3:18-20 where Christ's journey into Hades is implied:

As to the descent into Hades, we read in the fifteenth Psalm, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades," and as for the journey in prison with the Spirit we read in Peter in his Catholic Epistle, "Put to death," he says, "in the flesh, but quickened in the Spirit; in which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which at one time were disobedient, when the long-suffering of God once waited in the days of Noah while the ark was a-preparing." He, then, who is able worthily to set forth the meaning of these two journeys is able to untie the latchet of the shoes of Jesus; he, bending down in his mind and going with Jesus as He goes down into Hades, and descending from heaven and the mysteries of Christ's deity to the advent He of necessity made with us when He took on man (as His shoes). Now He who put on man also put on the dead, for "for this end Jesus both died and revived, that He might be Lord both of dead and living." This is why He put on both living and dead, that is, the inhabitants of the earth and those of Hades, so that He might be the Lord of both dead and living.⁸⁵

Dölger argues that Origen's interpretation of the two sandals of Jesus signifies the mortality and humanity of Christ.⁸⁶ And more polemically, it appears that Origen rejects the Eastern Valentinian teaching of the docetic Christology that flourished in

⁸³ David L. Miller, "The Two Sandals of Christ: Descent into History and into Hell," in *Aufstieg und Abstieg/Rise and Descent/Descente et Ascension*, ed. Adolf Portmann and Rudolf Ritsema (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1981), 149.

⁸⁴ Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John*, book 6, 174.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 175-77.

⁸⁶ Franz J. Dölger, "Das Schuhausziehen in der altchristlichen Tauf liturgie," *Antike und Christentum* 5 (1936): 98-100.

Alexandria in the third century C.E.⁸⁷ In this interpretation, it can be noted how Origen practices his exegetical work of the text. As Torjesen calls Origen's exegetical practice "a pedagogical hermeneutic of the soul," Origen mediates the teaching of Scripture to his hearers in terms of the doctrine of the *Descensus Christi*, according to the particular level of progress that the souls of his audience have achieved.⁸⁸

Origen interprets the words of John the Baptist for his readers' understanding of the saving doctrine of the *Descensus* that is considered as one of the most important Christological events in the history of human salvation. The "two sandals" of Jesus referred to by John is interpreted for his audience to proceed to a higher or more spiritual understanding of Christ's incarnation and the descent into Hades after Christ's death. John's dialogue with Jesus⁸⁹ and his role of forerunner in Christ's descent into History and Hades are ordering the saving doctrine of the *Descensus Christi*. This is also applied to his interpretation of the Witch of Endor.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ See Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.7; Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* 6.30; Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, part 3, "The School of Valentinus" (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987), 265-80.

⁸⁸ Karen J. Torjesen, "Body, Soul, and Spirit in Origen's Theory of Exegesis," *ATR* 67/1 (1985): 17-30, argues that Origen's exegetical practice consists in a procedure involving four steps, which are concerned with movement leading from the text to the hearer, and concludes that body, soul, and spirit of Scripture do not designate three levels of meaning (historical, moral, and mystical) in the interpretation of texts but a threefold usefulness of Scripture in ordering the doctrines that correspond pedagogically to the soul's progress.

⁸⁹ Another important dialogue with Jesus, which Origen interprets for his audience, is the text (Mt 11:3; Lk 7:19) where John the Baptist put the question to Christ by the embassy from his imprisonment; "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" This puzzling text came to have been explained by some church fathers' employing the idea of John's role as a precursor of Christ's coming to Hades since Origen's understanding of its text in his *Hom. 1 Reg.* 28, 3-25, and *Commentary on Matthew*, GCS (Leipzig: n.p., 1941), 105. See Sheerin, 7-16.

⁹⁰ It seems likely that Patricia Cox's article ("Origen and the Witch of Endor: Toward an Iconoclastic Typology") mistakes Origen's interpretation of this text for a historical one, rejecting a symmetrical typology of Origen's allegorical interpretation. Origen's

Origen considers the prophets, including John the Baptist, as precursors of Christ's coming to Hades because they are waiting for Christ's conquering the power of death and Hades and his saving the souls who have waited for the good news, or preaching by Him.

2. Origen's Interpretation Based on the Doctrine of the Soul and the Nature of God's Punishment in Hades.

Origen builds the interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18-20 on the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. He insists that the individual human soul has a divine origin and a divine nature. The ultimate goal of all souls is to return to the original state, which can be called "purification," or "perfection." For Origen, soteriology is closely related to eschatology. The salvations of the cosmos and the human soul are interpreted in terms of the doctrine of *apokatastasis* (ἀποκατάστασις)⁹¹ in which all souls and the cosmos return to the state of the beginning. In his important work, the *Peri Archon*, Origen shows how philosophical truths define a soteriological process of the human soul. Origen's speculation on the progress of the soul toward perfection reflects the product of several influences, notably Neo-Platonism, and of the spiritual issues which Origen confronted.⁹² Origen's idea of the soul's immortality and its return to the original state reflects the Neoplatonic idea of the divine origin and its return for unity with its divine

interpretation of 1 Samuel 28, however, also demonstrates his exegetical practice or procedure of the movement from the text to the hearer to teach the higher knowledge of Christ, as Torjesen suggests.

⁹¹ *Peri Archon* (PA), 2.3.5; 3.5.7, 6.9.

⁹² Celia E. Rabinowitz, "Personal and Cosmic Salvation in Origen," *VC* 38 (1984): 320.

source, which is seen in Plotinus' thought.⁹³ The former differs from the latter in focusing on the creation of the soul, whereby the soul being subject to change, accidentally and voluntarily falls away from the good.⁹⁴

If all human souls without any exception are destined to return to the One (Monad) after purification, there arises the issue of how God can deal with the souls waiting in Hades, or imprisoned in purgatory. This issue directly concerns what Origen thinks of the function and place of Hades. The interpretation of Christ's descent to save the soul from Hades, in the passage of 1 Peter 3:18-20, comes to include such controversial issues as: What is the function of Hades? Is there any eternal punishment for sinners? If not, what is the destiny of the devil and his minions or how can the Christian morality be claimed?

The doctrine of Hades or purgatory has a long tradition among Greek philosophers such as Plato and Pythagoras, who came to think that the incorporeal soul could suffer pleasure or pain. From this doctrine, Plato introduced the idea of corrective and disciplinary punishment for purifying the souls in Hades. Meanwhile, for the early Christians, only a resurrection day with its promise of reuniting body and soul guarantees ultimate justice and the fulfillment of human true destiny, which remains a fixed point for the church. But other related issues such as the nature of the resurrection body, the location of the soul in the period between death and the resurrection, and the duration of

⁹³ For more details, see Antonia Tripolitis, "Return to the Divine: Salvation in Thought of Plotinus and Origen," in *Disciplina Nostra: Essays in Memory of Robert F. Evans*, ed. Donald F. Winslow (Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979), 171-78; *idem*, *Doctrine of the Soul in the Thought of Plotinus and Origen* (New York: Libra Publishers, 1978), 79-86.

⁹⁴ Plotinus sees the fall of the pre-existent soul as voluntary and yet necessary. See Tripolitis, *Doctrine of the Soul*, 54-55. For him, the embodiment or fall of the soul is not really a sin.

any punishment were still in a state of flux.⁹⁵ It is noted that when Origen wrote the *Peri Archon*, Christian eschatological ideas had been various.⁹⁶

Although the scriptures show three types of the fate of evildoers after death (annihilation, unending punishment, and limited chastisement), the third type of punishment in Hades was more dominant before Augustine who recognized that a majority of people was denying eternal punishment after death.⁹⁷ The majority view on punishment in Hades is based on the Platonic idea that the nature of punishment in Hades is corrective, but not retributive.⁹⁸ This major premise of belief in the nature of God's punishment becomes the genesis of the later doctrine of purgatory in the Roman Catholic Church.⁹⁹ Origen develops this Platonic idea into his doctrine of the soul. As mentioned above in *Strom.* 6.6, where Clement mentions, "God's punishment is saving and disciplinary, leading to conversion," the Alexandrian interpretation of God's punishment is a limited chastisement:

As children are chastised by their teacher, or their father, so are we by Providence. But God does not punish, for punishment is retaliation for evil. He chastises, however, for good to those who are chastised, collectively and individually. (*Strom.* 7.16)

⁹⁵ Graham Keith, "Patristic Views on Hell," part 1, *EvQ* 71/3 (1999): 219.

⁹⁶ Eric R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge, Eng.: University Press, 1965), 131.

⁹⁷ Augustine, *Enchiridion* 103; see Keith, "Patristic Views on Hell," 219-20.

⁹⁸ Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third Century Church* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), 115, 186.

⁹⁹ David Brattston, "Hades, Hell and Purgatory in Ante-Nicene Christianity," *Churchman* 108/1 (1994): 72.

Tertullian¹⁰⁰ and Hippolytus¹⁰¹ also have the same older faith in Hades as a temporary penitentiary in which the dead are chastened in order to purge sins that they had committed on earth. Tertullian criticizes the pagan philosophers in the early third century, who deny every soul's going down to Hades and argue that some good souls would go directly to the heavenly Elysium without going to Hades.¹⁰² In a largely pagan society, where few admitted to strong convictions about Hell, there could be little deterrent value in a notion of eternal punishment.¹⁰³ Within these pagan philosophical and Christian environments, Origen's beliefs in the soul's absolute immortality and its ultimate participation in the very life of God resulted in his way of understanding sin.

According to Origen, all rational beings (*logika*) have here and now the position that their previous conduct deserves. Thus, in the same way, God's judgment will take place in proportion to the degree and nature of the sins of the souls in the afterlife, analogous to what takes place in this life:

As, then, without any doubt it will happen in the day of judgment that the good will be separated from the evil and the righteous from the unrighteous and every individual soul will by the judgment of God be allotted to that place of which his merits have rendered him worthy, a point which, if God will, we shall prove in the pages that follow, so also in the past some such process, I think, has taken place. (*PA* 2.9.8)¹⁰⁴

The diversity of the rational beings in this life resulted from the different progress

¹⁰⁰ Tertullian, *De anima* 55, argues that only the Christian martyr can enjoy the blessedness of Paradise, immediately after death, without being imprisoned in Hades.

¹⁰¹ Hippolytus, *Against Plato on the Cause of the Universe*.

¹⁰² Plato believes that the philosopher's soul goes directly to *Elysium* (*Republic* 7.740b-c; *Gorgias* 526a-d).

¹⁰³ Keith, "Patristic Views on Hell," part 1, 220.

¹⁰⁴ Translation from George W. Butterworth, trans., *On First Principles*, by Origen (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1973), 136.

through the imitation of God or the degree of deterioration through negligence (*PA* 2.9.6). Origen thinks that God's judgment on the souls already has taken place in this life, which is reflected in the different bodies of the rational beings and the different situations (good or bad) of this life. The sin of the soul is considered "sloth" or "negligence" for Origen, by which the falling away from blessedness is sometimes accidental because the rational beings are created so as to have just the accidental quality of goodness.¹⁰⁵

When Origen observes the descent of the soul as the falling away from being with God, it appears that his observation does not explain the progress of sin. Rather, he has toned down the seriousness of sin as well as the existence of the Devil.¹⁰⁶ For him, a fall does not involve total ruin, but a soul may retrace her steps and return to her former state. In this regard, Origen thinks that this world of darkness and punishment for the souls is similar to a state of Hades. This idea is especially distinctive for the Gnostics because they think that human souls are embodied in the flesh under the power of the archons and that the world below the *Pleroma* is considered as "Hades" (the lower regions of the world).¹⁰⁷ It is likely that under the gnostic influence, Origen makes a distinction between an "upper Hades" (this world) and a "lower Hades" where the dead descend:

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 53. What Origen means by "accidental" is that the creature's quality of goodness is liable to be lost, compared with God's absolute and essential goodness (*PA* 1.6.2).

¹⁰⁶ For Origen, evil exists in the will of the soul (*Cels.* 4.14-15), and is seen as lacking in good (*PA* 2.9.2)

¹⁰⁷ Irenaeus reports the Valentinian interpretation of Eph. 4:8-10, in which "the lower parts" is referred to as "this world of ours" (*AH* 5.31.2). Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:164-83, argues how broadly and deeply the gnostic motifs in the Hellenistic world of the New Testament are reflected within the language of the early Christian churches. Most of the Sethian gnostic texts in the *Nag Hammadi Codex* consider this world as Hades.

And perhaps, just as people on earth, when they die the common death of all, are in consequence of the deeds done here so distributed as to obtain different positions according to the proportion of their sins, if they are judged to be worthy of the place called Hades; so the people of the region above, when they die, if I may speak, descended into this Hades [this world], and are judged worthy of different habitations, better or worse, in the whole of this region of earth. (*PA* 4.3.10)

In Origen's time, such scriptural texts as Lk 16:19-31 ("Abraham's bosom"), Lk 23:29-43 ("the promise of Paradise to the good thief"), Phil. 1:23 ("desire to depart to be with Christ") became the classic passages used by the fathers to build the doctrine of the soul's return and immortality.¹⁰⁸ The blessed state of the soul (ἀναπαύεσθαι—"to repose") was a technical term to designate the goal of the soul after death, by the beginning of the third century C.E.¹⁰⁹ While Origen takes the soul as "immortal" like the Platonists, he considers it as "relatively immortal" in what concerns death because of sin (*Dialogue with Heraclides* 25-27). The soul's relative immortality requires divine grace through Christ.

It appears that Origen considers the *Descensus Christi* based on 1 Peter 3:18-20 as one applied exegesis from his soteriological and cosmological system that is comprehensively argued in the *Peri Archon*.¹¹⁰ With his traditional Platonic idea of corrective punishment in Hades, Origen emphasizes Christ's power over Hades enough to lead the captives in Hades to a place in the Kingdom of Heaven (*Commentary on Matthew* 16:8, *Hom. on Exod.* 6:6). In his *Commentary on Romans* 5:8-10, Origen

¹⁰⁸ Lawrence R. Hennessey, "Origen of Alexandria: The Fate of the Soul and the Body after Death," *SecondCent* 8 (1991): 165.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 165. Origen uses this verb in the *Dialogue with Heraclides* 23, refuting the alleged mortality of the soul by the Thnetopsychites.

¹¹⁰ As for his predominant soteriological interest in the *Peri Archon*, see Karen J. Torjesen, "Hermeneutics and Soteriology in Origen's *Peri Archon*," in *Studia Patristica* 21, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1989), 333-48.

speaks of Christ's victory over Death so that he might free those held by Death. For binding the strong, and triumphing over him on His Cross, Christ descended into Hades, the house of Death, and plundered his goods, i.e., drew forth the souls that he held.¹¹¹ Origen adds that for the salvation of the world, Christ descended to Hades and thence called forth the first man (*protoplastum*) and the words spoken to the thief, "today thou shall be with me in Paradise," were spoken not to him only, but to all saints also, for whom he descended to Hades.¹¹²

Origen's exegesis of the Petrine passage suggests that God has a purpose for every soul because it was created to be "immortal" in the beginning, and also has an intension to expand salvation through the corrective punishment in Hades. The idea of the expansive salvation in Hades was already demonstrated in his major work, the *Peri Archon*, when Origen tried to defend the inseparability of God's justice and goodness:

Let them learn, therefore, by searching the holy Scriptures, what are the individual virtues, and not deceive themselves by saying that that God who rewards every one according to his merits, does, through hatred of evil, recompense the wicked with evil, and not because those who have sinned need to be treated with severer remedies, and because He applies to them those measures which, with the prospect of improvement, seem nevertheless, for the present, to produce a feeling of pain. They do not read what is written respecting the hope of those who were destroyed in the deluge; of which hope Peter himself thus speaks in his first Epistle: "That Christ, indeed, was put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit, by which He went and preached to the spirits who were kept in prison, who once were unbelievers, when they awaited the long-suffering of God in the days of Noah, when the ark was preparing, in which a few, i.e., eight souls, were saved by water. Whereunto also baptism by a like figure now saves you" [1 Peter 3:18-20]. And with regard to Sodom and Gomorrah, let them tell us whether they believe the prophetic words to be those of the Creator God--of Him, viz., who is related to have rained upon them a shower of fire and brimstone. What does Ezekiel the prophet say of them? "Sodom," he says, "shall be

¹¹¹ Origen, *Rom.* 5 in *Patrologia Graeca* 4, ed. Jacques P. Migne. 1019, 1051 and *PA* 2.6.2.

¹¹² Origen, *Hom.* 15 in *Gen.* 5.

restored to her former condition.” (PA 2.5.3)¹¹³

This long passage demonstrates how Origen uses 1 Peter 3:18-20 for his vision of an expansive salvation in Hades, by referring to Ezekiel’s prophetic hope in Sodom’s restoration (Ezek. 16:55). But the relativity of the soul’s immortality because of sin needs the grace of Christ who is the Logos. In his argument against Celsus, Origen argues that Jesus’ disembodied soul (γυμνῇ σώματος γενόμενος ψυχῇ) held a “conversation” with the disembodied souls (ταῖς γυμναῖς σωμάτων ψυχαῖς). This conversation in Hades means Jesus’ preaching to the dead (1 Pet. 3:19, 4:6) as “Soul to souls.”¹¹⁴ Origen asserts that Jesus’ soul always acts as a medium between God and humans and that “it is for ever placed in the Logos, for ever in the wisdom, for ever in God, is God in all its acts and feelings and thoughts” (PA 2.6.6). Christ’s descent into Hades to save the souls is considered as the saving action of God.

Augustine’s Response to Origenist Understanding of the *Descensus Christi* in the Fourth and Fifth centuries C.E.

Though Origen himself had died in the middle of the third century, some theological ideas associated with Origen in the fourth century were exaggerated to the

¹¹³ Trans. Frederick Crombie in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4, *Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second* (Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 279. Originally published, Christian Literature Publishing, 1885.

¹¹⁴ This expression is found in Hippolytus’ *Holy Pasch* in Syriac, which is cited by Nicetas. See MacCulloch, *Harrowing of Hell*, 96.

point of being heretical.¹¹⁵ In the mid-390s, the Origenist controversy erupted in Palestine, when Rufinus aligned himself with John of Jerusalem, while Jerome rallied to the anti-Origenist side of Epiphanius of Salamis who charged John with Origenism. The second phase of the controversy was extended to the West between Rufinus' Origenist sympathizers and Jerome's anti-Origenist circle in terms of theological and extra-theological issues.¹¹⁶ Throughout the Origenist controversy, among the heterodox notions was an exaggeration of Origen's teaching on ἀποκατάστασις, or the restoration of all souls including sinners and evil demons. In the works of Epiphanius of Salamis, Jerome, Theophilus of Alexandria,¹¹⁷ and Augustine, the doctrine of universal salvation was inseparably linked with the name of Origen and its violent repudiation became a matter of course, even though there is no explicit affirmation of the notion of an ultimate and universal restoration including the salvation of the Devil in Origen.¹¹⁸ In the Eastern church, however, where Origenism was still influential, Rufinus was a staunch defender and Latin translator of Origen; he wrote a "Commentary on the Apostles"

¹¹⁵ Connell, "Descensus Christi," 269.

¹¹⁶ Elizabeth A. Clark, "Elite Networks and Heresy Accusations: Towards a Social Description of the Origenist Controversy" in *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of An Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 11-42.

¹¹⁷ Most of the information about the view of Theophilus, who was annoyed by the views of Origenists in the Egyptian monasteries, is to be found in the epistles of Jerome where he translated the letters of Theophilus into Latin. See Frederick W. Norris, "Universal Salvation in Origen and Maximus," in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell: Papers Presented at the Fourth Edinburgh Conference on Christian Dogmatics, 1991*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1991), 36-37.

¹¹⁸ David Satran, "The Salvation of the Devil: Origen and Origenism in Jerome's Biblical Commentaries," in *Studia Patristica* 23, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1989), 171. For Jerome's criticism on Origen's idea of a chance of restoration for demons, see his *Ep. Ad Mennam* (Mansi IX, 529) and *Ep. Ad Pamm. et Ocean.* 7, and see also Rufinus, *Apol.* 1.10, who leaves the salvation of the devil and his angels an open question. Augustine's objection to it is seen in *De civ. Dei* 21.17.

Creed,” the earliest source for a creed that includes the confession of “*descendit ad inferna*” which existed in the creed used at his church of Aquileia.¹¹⁹ His bishop Chromatius (388-407 C.E.), who baptized Rufinus, delivered a sermon at the Easter vigil whose main subject was “Christ’s descent to Hades.” This evidence indicates that, in the fourth and fifth centuries, the doctrine of the *Descensus Christi* became more controversial between the East and the West.¹²⁰ It is the case that the Western church accepted the other interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18-20 in order to see the doctrine of the *Descensus Christi* in a limited way. It is likely that the doctrine itself raised an issue of the second chance of repentance in Hades and the moral problem of last-minute conversion in the Western church.

In his letter to Augustine, the inquiry of Evodius, Bishop of Uzala, was about the descent and about who the “spirits” were whom Christ visited in hell. Rhetorically, Evodius had directed a particular question for Augustine’s attention and response, “Who are those ‘spirits’ to whom Peter refers?” and wonders, “Since the descending Christ had preached to them all and set them all free from darkness and suffering by his grace, would judgment find an empty hell? I am anxious to know what your holiness thinks.”¹²¹ The questions by Evodius demonstrate his contemporary understanding of 1 Peter 3:18-20, relating it to the doctrine of the *Descensus Christi*, by which the moral

¹¹⁹ MacCulloch, 67-69; Connell, “Descensus Christi,” 266, notes that Rufinus was one of the first who used the word *inferna*, “hell,” instead of the more ancient *inferos*, “lower world,” for the confession of faith by which many would come to know of the descent.

¹²⁰ Rufinus admitted that belief in the descent was new in a creed, and he apologized for the divergence from what the church of Rome and the Eastern churches professed, in his *Commentary on the Apostles’ Creed*. See Connell, 267.

¹²¹ See *Saint Augustine: Letters Vol. III (131-164)*, trans. Wilfrid Parsons (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1953), 383.

issues would be raised among Christians. Augustine admits from the start that his inquiry disturbs him profoundly. He seeks, however, to dispel from Evodius the possibility that the efficacy of the descent and of God's grace offered by it might empty hell completely. Augustine doubts that an "empty hell" could be an option for the completely undeserving sinners.¹²²

In his reply to Evodius, Augustine proposes the interpretation of the Petrine passage in a new way, in which the text refers to the activity of the pre-existent Christ who in his divine nature preached through the mouth of the righteous Noah to the wicked people who lived before the Flood.¹²³ Augustine spiritualizes the phrase, "the spirits in prison," in that it implies "spiritually now dead living on earth" in Noah's time.¹²⁴ Emphatically Augustine tries to evade the sense in which the passage has any bearing at all on the subject of the *Descensus Christi*.¹²⁵ This Augustinian spiritualization of the text to evade the moral dilemma which the *Descensus Christi* could cause ("empty hell" or "second chance of repentance in Hades") has been influential in the following period of the medieval Western church. Augustine branded as heretical the view that "upon Christ's descent into hell the unbelievers believed and all were liberated from Hell,"¹²⁶ rejecting the Alexandrian notion of universal salvation and its way of interpretation to

¹²² Connell, 270.

¹²³ William J. Dalton, "Interpretation and Tradition: An Example from 1 Peter," *Gregorianum* 49/1 (1968): 16.

¹²⁴ For more details on Augustine's interpretation, see Grudem, "He Did Not Descend Into Hell," 110-11.

¹²⁵ Martin H. Scharlemann, "He Descended into Hell: An Interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18-20," *CJ* (1989): 318.

¹²⁶ *De haeresibus* 79 in Liguori G. Müller, trans., *De Haeresibus: A Translation with an Introduction and Commentary*, by Augustine (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1956), 115. Augustine followed Filaster of Brescia in the lists of heresies. The author of *Praedestinatus* (c. 79) calls them the *Adecerditae* (PL 53.614B).

claim the *Descensus Christi*.

Augustine's interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18-20 revolves around his defending of the doctrines of everlasting punishment and eternal hell. He justifies the justice of hell by saying that the seriousness of the punishment must be proportional to the seriousness of the crime.¹²⁷ Augustine emphasizes the inscrutability for humans in this world of divine judgment. It is argued that at the final Day of Judgment all the perplexities of God's judicial dealings would be resolved with regard not only to Hell but also to all God's interim acts of judgments and the manifest inequalities among humans.¹²⁸ The issues involved in God's eternal punishment were considered as harsh and unjust. Thus, for Augustine, the universal salvation based on the doctrine of the *Descensus Christi* was understood to be a compromising humanistic perspective on God's justice.

When Augustine came to see the situation of his African churches where many forms of sins were so openly and habitually practiced, he took on a pessimistic view of Christian immorality and came to appeal to the reality of everlasting punishment and hell.¹²⁹ In terms of God's justice, Augustine uses the doctrine of the original sin transmitted from Adam to justify the miseries of newborns and the eternal condemnation of those who have no opportunity to be joined to Christ in faith and baptism, asserting the moral impotence of human nature.¹³⁰ Augustine considers as serious the original sin

¹²⁷ Charles Seymour, "Hell, Justice, and Freedom," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 43 (1998): 71, argues that if the punishments disproportionate to crimes are justified by the state, God is equally justified in punishing unrepentant sinners with an everlasting hell. See Augustine, *De civ. Dei* 21.17.

¹²⁸ Augustine, *Enchiridion* 94-5; *De civ. Dei* 20.2

¹²⁹¹²⁹ Augustine, *Enchiridion* 80. See Graham Keith, "Patristic Views on Hell," part 2, *EvQ* 71/4 (1999): 292.

¹³⁰ J. Patout Burns, "The Economy of Salvation: Two Patristic Traditions," *TS* 37 (1976): 609.

whose devastating effects proceed into innumerable actual sins in terms of human relationship to God.¹³¹

Although Augustine claims that he does not know the origin of the soul that belongs to God's mystery,¹³² he attacks the Origenist theory of souls (souls sinned first in heaven and received bodies as punishments or prisons in accord with their sins).¹³³ If Origen was inclined to interpret 1 Peter 3:18-20 on the basis of his doctrine of the soul, Augustine rejected this Origenist interpretation because he thought that humans with original sin should be punished eternally in Hades unless they do repent and receive the baptism of forgiveness. Augustine met a Christian group who had an Origenist theological position that God's compassion will put a time limit to the torment of those who are really worthy of eternal punishment.¹³⁴ Augustine holds to the doctrine of eternal punishment because he believes that it is clearly taught in Scripture and that the fear of hell actually helps many to make a first step toward true piety.

As Augustine assumes general dismissal in the Western Church of the Origenist view on universal salvation of all souls and the nature of God's punishment, his reply to Bishop Evodius who questioned the issues involved in the Origenist interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18-20 includes his theological positions on hell and the nature of punishment.

¹³¹ Professor Torjesen points out the problem of the original sin, in that Augustine's claim of the "seriousness of the original sin" cannot speak of the "seriousness of the crime" at the same time. I think that while Origen tried to theologize his Platonic ideas to refute Gnostic fatalism and determinism, Augustine ended with another fatalism of the original sin in his theological construction.

¹³² Augustine, *De anima* IV, 4.5; 6.8; 11.16; 24.38.

¹³³ Augustine, *Ep.* 7.20 (*CSEL* 44, 539).

¹³⁴ Augustine, *De civ. Dei* 21.17-18.

Summary

The doctrine of the harrowing of Hades has aided the natural growth of the belief that God delivers souls from punishment in purgatory or Hades since early Christianity developed the possibility of the remission of pain in the afterlife punishment and also that of the transference of the sinful souls to the state of bliss through purgatorial punishments. The later development of the doctrine of purgatory appears to come from the understanding of how the afterlife in Hades is going to be for souls who are waiting for the resurrection. Attention to the salvation of the old saints before Christ's coming, who stayed in Hades, was drawn in the apostolic writings (*1 Clement* and the *Shepherd of Hermas*). Christ's descent to Hades during his death came to be theologically articulated by several ante-Nicene fathers for providing a chance to redeem those old saints from their intermediate state in Hades.

The biblical references as proof-text for such a doctrine usually come from the combination of the two enigmatic Petrine passages in 1 Peter 3:18-19 and 4:6. Jesus' descending to Hades and preaching to the spirits in prison have long since caused theological and Christological problems among the church fathers and even the creedal formations in the history of the church. Clement of Alexandria first introduced these Petrine passages to his theological affirmation that Christ extended his salvation to the old saints and even to the righteous pagans by his descent and proclamation of the salvation message to them in Hades. In a more articulate way, Origen applied this teaching of Christ's descent to his doctrine of

the soul. It seems that Origen's theological foundation of this teaching is based on the theological and cosmological premise that every soul (rational beings) has a constitutive relationship with God the Creator so that every rational beings will be ultimately purified throughout the cycles of ages through God's continuous good will and saving will and through the intermediary role of the Logos (*PA* 1.2.6-13). In this regard, the afterlife punishment in hell is correctional and disciplinary for souls to be purified, just as this world serves as a place for educating and disciplining the souls. For Origen, the teaching of the *Descensus Christi* fits well into his doctrine of the soul as well as his Platonic tradition.

Against Origenist understanding of the Petrine passage that leads logically to the "empty hell," however, Augustine argues for the eternal punishment and the seriousness of human sins, by way of spiritualizing the Petrine passage. When the Origenist understanding of Christ's descent into Hades, related with 1 Peter, came to be branded as heretical, the Augustinian Western church was suspicious of the teaching of the *Descensus Christi* in its insertion into the creed. In the history of Christianity, however, it should be noted that its teaching was well-attested in the early apostolic teachings. Even Augustinian denial of it might be an unfortunate discontinuity with the earlier and more original church tradition.

Conclusions

The paradoxical triumph through death as the main event in the combat myth is usefully articulated in the Christological elaboration in the Letter to the Hebrews:

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. (Heb. 2: 14-16)

“Death and Devil” are described as the opponents of Christ and His ministry who will have the ultimate victory over them through His suffering and death. Christ’s death also will bring about the saints’ liberation from the fear of death and the power of the Devil. Such a Christological articulation of the effect of Christ’s death as *Descensuskampf* or *Chaoskampf* appear clearly in the *Gospel of John*, the *Letter to the Hebrews*, the *Book of Revelation*, and the *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* (ch. 9), in the late first and early second centuries. The later idea of Christ’s harrowing or disarming of the spiritual enemies is also indicated in the Deutero-Pauline letters (Col. 1:15-20, 2:15; Eph. 4:8-10; 1 Tim. 3:16).

In conclusion, I need to make some points in considering the development of such a Christological idea of descent. First, there are mythical themes in Christ’s descent, such as a hope for immortality, enthronement by the combat against chaos, and the breaking into the boundary of the dead. These mythical themes converged on Christ’s descent.

Second, Christ’s descent into Hades hinges on theological speculations on the effect of Jesus’ death, following a certain trajectory of Christianizing the diverse *descensus* traditions. It is likely that when early Christians became exposed to social

pressure and persecutions in the Greco-Roman society, they began to meditate on the effect of Christ's death and articulate it in a cosmic level to compensate their sufferings and deaths and wait for the expected Christian victory over spiritual enemies. This Christological articulation of Christ's death in a way of *Chaoskampf* or the combat myth ("Christ was dead, but he is ultimately the *Victor*") was influenced by the *descensus* tradition before Christianity. Thus the cultural religious milieu embedded in the text is likely to have appealed to the audience of late antiquity in the Greco-Roman world, though the *Descensus Christi* aroused the doctrinal opposition in the Western church.

Third, there are Christian conceptualizations of diverse *descensus* traditions by way of appropriation and adaptation, toward the idea of the *Descensus Christi ad Inferos*. This Christological conceptualization is embedded in several biblical texts, though it is difficult to discern and clarify it because the Bible tends to demythologize such descent myths and to historicize them for salvation history. This, however, does not mean that one can disregard the mythical background as well as its religious environment standing behind the biblical texts. Even the theme of Christ's descent into Hades necessarily reflects mythological overtones in itself, inasmuch as it involves the features of the afterlife and the cosmology.

Jonah's descent to Sheol adds another sphere to the bipartite universe (heaven and earth) so that this distinctive experience functions to emphasize YHWH as the Creator who also rules the underworld and renews the Israelites in their cultic experience at the Temple that becomes a cosmic center for them in the exilic and post-exilic period. Through its re-mythologization and de-historicization of the *descensus* tradition, Jonah's descent becomes, in the Q material, a "sign of Jonah" which serves as the only

representation of Jesus' death for three days and three nights. Behind this conceptual formation as a "sign," the *descensus* tradition is conceptualized in the Q material, not to follow the way in which the combat myth uses the descent tradition: a hero, or a champion god is expected to conquer the chaotic monster or the antagonist god. Rather a "sign of Jonah" represents Jonah's near-death and Sheol experience, though later the early church came to combine Jesus' death with a combat myth, for the idea of Christ's harrowing of hell.

When Greek philosophical tradition begins to substantiate the feature of the afterlife and compartmentalize the underworld, Hades, the old rigid boundary between the living and the dead is broken, so that the Greek *nekyia* or the tour of hell becomes a popular religious folktale in late antiquity. Luke 16:19-31 indicates how Luke uses the *descensus* tradition by his mimesis of the Greek descent within the literary framework of the Homeric *nostos*. This tells us how the souls wait for the afterlife judgment and are judged according to their deeds. Both the Jewish descent in Jonah and the Greek descent in Luke provide a theological and cosmological context for Christ's descent to Hades in the biblical world: Jesus' death and the souls in the afterlife.

The existence of diverse *descensus* traditions is recognized by Paul, who excludes the descent of Sophia (the Sophia speculation) from his Christological articulations. Rather he claims that "Christ is the Sophia of God," while he uses such a *descensus* tradition in terms of Christ's humiliation and exaltation. Though he recognizes the descent story of Christ's harrowing or disarming the angelic powers, he only adopts it from the perspective of Christ's *ascensus* to cosmic enthronement and lordship. This

Pauline conceptualization of the *descensus* tradition is based on his geo-centric cosmology in which there is no subterranean Hades.

John advanced the phase of the mythological revision of the *descensus* tradition by applying it to the Johannine sayings of the Son of Man. The theological context for the descent of the Son of Man is that Christ came to history (Incarnation) in disguise, which causes the incomprehension of the disciples and other people. The confusion and misunderstanding regarding Jesus' identity is similar to the gnostic redeemer descent that functions to deceive the archons and powers. John and the Gnostics share the same worldview in that the world is itself "dark" and "night" like Hades so that the redeemer as the light comes to wake the sleeping souls. In this regard, John tends to spiritualize the *descensus* tradition and reinterprets it in terms of the journey of the soul (descent and reascent).

Though it is recognized that the trajectory of the *descensus* tradition follows the diverse biblical conceptualizations, the idea of Christ's descent into Hades has become prominent in 1 Peter. The old Jewish Watcher myth stands behind the Petrine passage (3:18-22). When the Gentile world is seen as enslaved to the heavenly angelic powers, the righteous Christians are supposed to suffer when they are baptized. This baptism means their agreement to face persecution, as well as their appeal to God. The author confirms that baptism functions as a testimony which is marked with a seal which guarantees their victory over the evil powers, like that of Christ over the angelic powers, when His death means breaking into the house of Hades and the resultant subjugation of the evil spirits.

The harrowing of Hades by Christ's descent begins with the early church fathers' Christological speculation, as they think of the possibility of redeeming the old saints from Hades by Christ's descent to Hades. Although the creedal phrase of the *Descensus Christi* has been found in the mid-fourth century, many ante-Nicene fathers witness to the teaching of the *Descensus Christi ad Inferos*. The universalistic view of salvation in the Alexandrian fathers stressed the two Petrine passages, 3:19-20 and 4:6, to teach the possibility of extended salvation for many souls, though the beneficiaries of Christ's descent have been in debate. These passages came to take an important position to justify and theologize such a universalistic interpretation of salvation, based on a Platonic idea of purgatorial punishment of the afterlife. In the history of the Western church, Augustine's rejection of Origen's literal interpretation of the Petrine passage, by spiritualizing it, has become so influential as to brand as heretical the teaching of the *Descensus Christi ad Inferos*, though this resulted in breaking with a more ancient teaching which had been accepted as authentic in the East.

I have argued that the teaching of Christ's descent into Hades is not simply a doctrinal and historical mishap that was mistakenly articulated. Rather it is worthwhile to note that this teaching is one trajectory of the biblical use of the *descensus* tradition that has been passed on in the history of ideas. The theological agendas of the authors of the biblical texts articulate different conceptualizations of the *descensus* tradition. Though such agendas might lead to no expectation of such a teaching of Christ's descent to Hades, Christ's death for three days and nights came to mean something soteriological for Christians. This speculation on Christ's death leads many to think of His death as the *Chaoskampf* in their religious cultural milieu.

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